

A MAD CERTAINTY: NARRATIVE INSTABILITY, INSANITY, AND THE  
SEARCH FOR ANSWERS IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY FRENCH FICTION

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Writers of every period articulate a sense that the world is changing; in modernity, that constant change is intensified by an accelerating pace and comprehensive upheaval. Our reaction to change (personal, social, or technological) and its concurrent disequilibrium defines us. Some adapt to new circumstances and struggle through the uncertainty while others turn instead to delusion or constructed realities that provide the illusion of certainty. In the latter reaction late 19th-century French psychologists recognized the possibility of insanity: religious mania, megalomania, spiritualism, and use of hallucinogens were all possible pathologies related to this dynamic. Fin-de-siècle French novelists were very aware of contemporary psychological theories and models, as some demonstrate in their texts. Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, Isidore Ducasse, Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Jean Lorrain explore the danger in constructing selective realities and sketch the failure and madness inherent in these strategies. All manipulate the tropes and typical construction of fiction to highlight their depictions of madness; the authors variously reshape the narrative arc, introduce comedy to undercut narrative reliability, and create temporal inconsistencies and ambiguities. Using thematic analysis via late 19th-century psychological theories and the

“New Rhetoric” as well as narratological examination of plot and structure, I have charted the spectrum of the insane reactions these authors portray. These works combine the madness of the protagonists with unsettling narrative techniques to portray the dangers and depths of untenable reactions to the wrenching changes of their time.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: QUESTS FOR CERTAINTY, JOURNEYS INTO MADNESS .....	1
II. OTHER-WORLDLY CERTAINTY: RELIGIOUS DELUSION AND “HIGHER TRUTH” – <i>LA TENTATION DE SAINTE ANTOINE</i> AND “LE HORLA” .....	27
Religious delusion, higher truth – <i>La Tentation de Saint Antoine</i> .....	30
Narrative structure of anti-dogma – <i>La Tentation de Saint Antoine</i> .....	37
Obsession with the invisible - “Le Horla” .....	49
Narrative disequilibrium - “Le Horla” .....	68
Certainty and illusion - <i>La Tentation de Saint Antoine</i> and “Le Horla” .....	74
III. MASTERS OF REALITY: MEGALOMANIA AND THE CERTAINTY OF “GENIUS” - <i>LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR</i> AND <i>L’ÈVE FUTURE</i> .....	76
<i>Les Chants de Maldoror</i> – Critical Background.....	80
Criminal genius – <i>Les Chants de Maldoror</i> .....	87
Magician, mastermind, monster – <i>L’Ève future</i> .....	110
Dissociated grandiosity – <i>Les Chants de Maldoror</i> and <i>L’Ève future</i> .....	167
IV. ALTERNATIVE CERTAINTY: LA NEVROSE AND “ALTERNATIVE” REALITY – <i>À REBOURS</i> AND <i>CONTES D’UN BUVEUR D’ÉTHÉR</i> .....	169
An unnatural aesthete – <i>À Rebours</i> .....	173
Addiction and alternative reality – <i>Contes d’un buveur d’éther</i> .....	201
Manipulation of narrative time in alternative reality .....	231
Aesthetics and substances – <i>À Rebours</i> and <i>Contes d’un buveur d’éther</i> .....	235
V. CONCLUSION: DELUSIONAL ANSWERS AND UNSTABLE CERTAINTY .....	237

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Interior [top] and exterior [bottom] plot shapes – <i>Tentation</i> .....	39
2. Interior [top] and exterior [bottom] plot shapes – "Le Horla". .....	70

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Individual “visions” in <i>La Tentation</i> .....	32
2. Individual “attacks” in “Le Horla” .....	52
3. Stages of philosophical equilibrium in “Le Horla”.....	56
4. Individual stories in the <i>Contes</i> .....	203

## INTRODUCTION: QUESTS FOR CERTAINTY, JOURNEYS INTO MADNESS

Washington Irving claimed that “There is a certain relief to change, even though it be bad to worse,” but many citizens of *fin de siècle* France would have disagreed heatedly (Irving x). France in the late nineteenth century was a roller-coaster ride of social economic and artistic change which many experienced as intensely disorienting and disturbing, leading sufferers to fumble for something, anything, to cling to in troubled times. There was conflict and transformation in all quarters, from crises of secularization to rapid industrialization to questions of national identity and social class. As a result, individuals looked to many possible sources for answers: religion, political ideologies, charismatic leaders, drugs, and many more. During the same era, psychology was burgeoning, developing the fields that we now think of as psychiatry, cognitive psychology, and neurology, combining imagination and science (Carroy et al. 7). Psychologists and doctors such as Jean-Martin Charcot greatly expanded medical knowledge of not only the types of physical injuries (“lesions”) that could produce profound mental disturbances, but other factors as well, drawn from empirical observation and experimentation (Dowbiggin 22-23).

In a cultural climate such as *fin de siècle* France, fiction could serve as (among other things) a realistic representation of society and its problems, a guide to answers, or commentary on both. I have chosen to examine works that combine all of these goals to a greater or lesser extent, although rather than offering answers to the question of change, they comment by warning against certain answers; they did this not only by thematic content but by structural alterations or modifications of the narrative. Examining these

fictional representations allows the reader not only to gather a sense of the time and place during which the pieces were written, but also to, perhaps, avoid some of the pitfalls that the authors describe for those faced with unsettling change.

Binaries are a major facet of literature in general, and nowhere more so than in late-nineteenth-century French literature: religion vs. secularism, for example, or monarchy vs. republicanism. By “binaries” however I am not referring only to either-or antonymic propositions, but also to choices between two ideas that just will not fit together, that cannot be reconciled, though they can be forced into uneasy cohabitation for a time. For example, while “love” and “hate” are generally antonyms, “love” and “fear” are not, though the two are by nature in conflict. In this vein, I examine the theme of insanity, specifically insanity as the late nineteenth century conceived it. Our own era exhibits significant ambiguity about the very existence of insanity, uncertainty over the ethical status of the label “insane,” and a profound suspicion that madness is an eternally shifting spectrum that constitutes an epistemological maze. In contrast, the psychologists of *fin de siècle* France were by and large certain that insanity was very real, that it was a significant cause of aberrant social behavior, and that given enough biomedical research, case studies, and time, they would be able to understand and delineate madness with scientific precision. Given the contrast between modern and late nineteenth-century approaches to the question of insanity, it is essential to look at the literature of the time through a *fin de siècle* lens and to avoid, as far as possible, projecting twenty-first-century psychological theories onto the past.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault was a central figure for 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy whose work centered on power and discourse; his influence on literary history and theory has been profound; as Dieter Freundlieb has noted, “His influence on literary studies has been considerable nonetheless and is likely to grow for some time to

An important element of nineteenth-century psychological theory and practice is a strict devotion to Occam's Razor:<sup>2</sup> all else being equal, insane behavior in an individual indicates that the person is mentally disturbed, not that he or she is a visionary, a medium, or a semi-divine figure. I examine the relationship between the *fin de siècle* idea of insanity and observable, consensual, commonsense reality. Among the various fictional works that explore this relationship, I analyze six late nineteenth-century French works of fiction which I have grouped into three pairs. The protagonists in Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine* and Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla" adhere to a supernatural doctrinal truth. Isidore Ducasse's *Chants de Maldoror* and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* center on self-created and self-obsessed definitions of reality. The protagonists of Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À Rebours* and Jean Lorrain's

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come" Freundlieb, Dieter. "Foucault and the Study of Literature." *Poetics Today*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1995, pp. 301-344, JSTOR, doi:10.2307/1773331.. He also influenced, to a lesser extent, cultural history; in general, literary historians have accepted Foucault with less scrutiny than have historians. In the words of cultural historian Patricia O'Brian, Foucault was "criticized for his inattention to chronology, his oversights, his minimizations, his exaggerations" by many historians O'Brian, Patricia. "Michel Foucault's History of Culture." *The New Cultural History*, edited by Lynn Hunt, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 25-46.. This is not to say that historians have completely disregarded Foucault's work; his *Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique* is unquestionably an important text in the history of psychology. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* rightly states that Foucault "argued that the alleged scientific neutrality of modern medical treatments of insanity are in fact covers for controlling challenges to conventional bourgeois morality" Gutting, Gary and Johanna Oksala. "Michel Foucault." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2019 edition, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/>>; even so, I shall not be using Foucault's text.

Several factors make his analysis of negligible relevance for mine. Firstly, his broad view of the philosophy and class-based treatment of lunatics only connects peripherally to the history of 19<sup>th</sup>-century psychological theories and classifications themselves. More importantly, his analysis focuses heavily on the phenomenon of institutionalization; this topic permeates his entire discussion. In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century medical and psychological treatises I use for my analysis, mental asylums function as a source for case studies and a locale for clinical observation, not as a subject of sociological or philosophical discourse.

<sup>2</sup> "entities (usually interpreted as assumptions) should not be multiplied beyond necessity (*Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*), and hence simple explanations should be preferred to more complex ones." Colman, Andrew M. "Ockham's razor". *A Dictionary of Psychology*, edition 4th, 2015, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199657681.001.0001/acref-9780199657681-e-5689>.

*Contes d'un buveur d'éther* exemplify a preference for a hallucinatory altered state of consciousness to the world as we (and the other characters in these texts) commonly perceive it. These works make up a mini-corpus that features both unsuccessful strategies by protagonists to avoid societal dislocation, and novel and disquieting approaches by authors to the writing of fiction (e.g. plot progress, irony, temporal uncertainties). These six authors each explore a pathological reaction to massive societal and cultural change. Even by the standards of the *fin de siècle*, “sanity” and “insanity” are not absolute opposites; rather, the terms reflect varying degrees of ability to cope with unexpected and disconcerting changes or dimensions in an individual’s personal life or societal *milieu*, and betray severe incompatibility rather than a state of mutual exclusivity. Each text stages a conflict between characters’ experience of empirical reality and their need for a certainty newly unavailable in a purely mundane and commonsense consideration of the changing world around them. When faced with discordance these characters thus cling to tropes and commonplaces, choosing to suppress empirical reality in favor of delusion rather than attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable.

The incompatibility between empirical reality and delusional constructs of reality is central to my analysis, as are the pathological mental states that can result from such incompatible concepts of reality. One particular model in rhetoric (in the sense of argumentation rather than stylistics) centers on the phenomenon of incompatible concepts of intangible concepts: in their “new rhetoric,” Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca represent the correspondences and strains between possibly incompatible ideas via an analytical model they call “philosophical pairs” (*couples philosophiques*). Philosophical pairs are a shorthand for demonstrating the tension



between potentially conflicting, but not opposite, concepts such as those I mentioned above: theory and practice, for example, or surface and whole. This tension is a mirror for the incompatibility in the context of my own mini-corpus between insanity and empirical reality. The “new rhetoric” was originally philosophical and political, rather than aesthetic or literary;<sup>3</sup> As a philosophical pair, “appearance” and “reality” are represented with a horizontal line separating them<sup>4</sup>, thus  $\frac{\text{apparence}}{\text{réalité}}$ . Olbrechts-Tyteca notes that the fact that “reality” is on the bottom (i.e., is “term II,” as opposed to the top, “term I”) means that it is the more fundamental of the two terms: “Le terme II fournit un critère, une norme permettant de distinguer ce qui est valable de ce qui ne l’est pas, parmi les aspects du terme I” (Olbrechts-Tyteca 82). Between these two incompatible ideas, then, one is more basic than the other, and moreover can provide a standard or a known quantity by which to *evaluate* the other – in this case, that standard is “reality.” In her model the top term is the one that leaps out at us, that is easy to see at a glance; in a sense, her “term I” is what comes out “on top” when ideas conflict – what we choose to see, even if neither is palpably “superior,” hence “appearance.”

I have adopted Olbrecht-Tyteca’s conception of philosophical pairs to examine how six late nineteenth-century authors explore different types of insanity (as understood in

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<sup>3</sup> In a 1979 article in *La Revue Internationale de Philosophie* Olbrechts-Tyteca modified this original model, however, to fit literary analysis, focusing on the model of “appearance” in conflict with “reality.” In general, Olbrechts-Tyteca is ignored in favor of Chaïm Perelman, her more prominent co-author on the “new rhetoric” project. This is not uniformly true; David Frank and Michelle Bolduc have highlighted her unique expansion of the theory Frank, David A. and Michelle Bolduc. “Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's New Rhetoric.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 96, no. 2, 2010, pp. 141-163, doi:10.1080/00335631003796685., but this is uncommon, though others have noted her significance to the “new rhetoric” (e.g., Joseph Marchal and Barbara Warncik).

<sup>4</sup> This graphic can lead to confusion, since the arrangement makes it seem as though the two concepts form a fraction, which they emphatically do not. There are no mathematics involved in “philosophical pairs;” rather, the arrangement visually depicts an unequal but non-antonymic relationship.

the terms of their own era) as a reaction to an essential conflict between a character's desires and needs on the one hand, and empirical reality on the other. These authors articulate their protagonists' desires in subjective fashion via first-person narration or close perspective third-person narration, while counting on the reader to provide the evaluative standard by applying lessons drawn from his or her everyday experience and commonsense reasoning. In her 1979 article, Olbrechts-Tyteca points out a specific aspect of the philosophical pairs that distinguishes them from other pairs (e.g., pairs of antonyms): the ideas or concepts in a philosophical pair are incompatible but at the same time have a link, a relationship that connects them and provides one of the more significant and thought-provoking aspects of such pairs: "C'est d'ailleurs l'établissement d'un tel rapport qui transforme un couple classificatoire ou antithétique en couple philosophique" (Olbrechts-Tyteca 82-83). To illustrate this property, she proposes sets of possible incompatible pairs with different types of "relationships," all variations on "appearance" (term I) vs. "reality" (term II). Among others, she includes the cases of one idea as a particular instance or application of the second; one idea as a fragment of the second; and one idea as a representation of the second (83-85). Olbrechts-Tyteca admits that her lists are not exhaustive, and I have created my own pairs inspired by hers. In all cases my pairs demonstrate the binary nature of the conflict between appearance and reality as portrayed in the specific works that I discuss. Whereas the bottom term in my pairs (term II, "reality") is uniformly "empirical reality," understood as the underlying state of the protagonist (i.e., insanity) that readers can perceive via the life experience and logic they bring to the texts, my top term (term I, "appearance") varies from one set of paired texts to the next. "Term I" always represents what a text's protagonist chooses to

regard as “real” in reacting to the disturbing and awkward implications of changing conditions; the variation comes from the particular pathology inherent in the characters. For my versions of “appearance,” I use the idea of “higher truth” to represent reality as it flows from supernatural beliefs and doctrine (Chapter II); “self-generated reality” to represent a megalomaniac’s internal reality (Chapter III); and “alternative reality” to represent deliberately altered consciousness that leads to a hallucinatory version of reality (Chapter IV). It is a truism that everyone has a different perception of “reality,” and that no one has a monopoly on truth; this fact itself, however, suggests that simply absorbing another’s conception of “reality” or creating one’s own without any critical thought is at best suspect judgment and at worst actively delusional; the result is instability or insanity.

Beyond the psychological theories of the late nineteenth century and *couples philosophiques*, I have used narratological analysis of structure and utterance to investigate the novels in my mini-corpus. Narrative theory tells us that structure and convention play an essential role in shaping a narrative; I have incorporated several narratological techniques, including the consideration of plot arc, the reliability of the narrative focus or voice, and the examination of sequence and time manipulation within the narrative. These techniques come from a variety of literary theorists and critics, among others Raphaël Baroni (*La tension narrative*), Wayne Booth (*The Rhetoric of Narrative*), Gerard Genette (*Le discours du récit, Métalepse*), and James Phelan (*Living to tell about it*). Rather than surveying at this point the various narratological phenomena I address, I shall present them in detail as they occur in the main chapters.

The individual chapters pair particular works by both theme (in terms of nineteenth-century classifications of insanity) and structure (in terms of specific transgressions of

narrative conventions). The first chapter considers *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* and “Le Horla,” both of which center around supernatural delusion and the desire to turn to a “higher truth” when faced with the contradictions of reality. Both also contain deliberate aberrations in the classic structure of a plot as represented in a simplified form in drama by Freytag’s pyramid (Dobson et al. 171). The second chapter focuses on *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *L’Ève future*; both texts sketch a charismatic protagonist whose behavior that corresponds to the *fin de siècle* models of megalomania. The third and last chapter discusses *À Rebours* and the *Contes d’un buveur d’éther* in the context of the late nineteenth-century psychological notion of *la névrose* and the pursuit of a state of altered consciousness; the authors of these works employ analepsis (discontinuities of time and sequence) to underline their protagonists’ mental instability in both cases. In order to relate the differing psychological models and versions of in these six works, I shall give overviews of these texts that give a sense of the psychological models and themes in them and elucidate the pairings that I have used. In the following chapters, I shall explore the representations in these works of nineteenth-century psychological models and relationships between empirical reality and substitute realities in these specific texts.

The first work I examine in Chapter II is *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Although Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) is one of the most prominent nineteenth-century French authors, not all his works are as well-studied as *Madame Bovary* and *L’Education Sentimentale*. A less well-known but more colorful novel is *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874). Neither romantic nor realist, *La Tentation* combines meticulous historical research with hallucinatory and imaginative description to create a work rich in contradiction. Claudine Gothot-Mersch sums up *La Tentation* as a work that “échappe

aux classifications. Entreprise baroque, démesurée ... d'un Flaubert pré-symboliste" (Flaubert 44-45); Kenneth Burke claims that it is Flaubert's "nearest approach to the less realistic and more declamatory aspects of fiction" (Burke 8). Gothot-Mersch (Belgian and writing in the 1980s) and Burke (American and writing in the early 1930s), though widely separated in space and time, agree on the unusually vivid nature of *La Tentation* and its divergence from Flaubert's best-known novels, as well as on the difficulty of characterizing the text categorically. In *La Tentation* Flaubert tells his own version of the story of Desert Father and noted ascetic Saint Anthony of Egypt. According to Athanasius, a church historian and bishop of Alexandria in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E., Anthony was a desert hermit of great godliness who endured tempting visions from the devil to stay true to his faith. Flaubert drew on church histories such as that of Athanasius, as well as the rich medieval narrative and iconography about the hermit's ordeal, to create great detail about an array of temptations ranging from heresy to eroticism to mysticism.

Flaubert himself had a real fondness for the work, remarking in a letter to George Sand in February 1874 (upon its forthcoming publication) that "je ne vous cache point que j'ai eu un quart d'heure de grande tristesse lorsque j'ai contemplé la première épreuve [of *La Tentation*]. Il en coûte de se séparer d'un vieux compagnon!" (Flaubert and Franklin-Grout 172). Flaubert, by the 1870s at least not known for emotional outbursts, obviously mourned the end of a long project which had been in some way a friend to him. It is unsurprising that Flaubert called *La Tentation* an "old companion;" he had been working on the novel since at least 1849, when he had his friends Louis Bouilhet and Maxime Du Camp read an initial version (Flaubert 7). In 1856, Flaubert finished a second version of *La Tentation*, fragments of which appeared in *L'Artiste* from

December 1856 through February 1857 (242). The author persevered in his quest to perfect the narrative, working through late 1872 on a significantly revised and extended manuscript in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war (243).

Flaubert was a novelist *par excellence*; though he also wrote familiar/autobiographical essays (e.g., *Memoirs d'un fou*), dabbled in theater (e.g., *Le Château des coeurs*), and wrote some shorter fiction (*Trois contes*), it is for his novels that he is justly famous. *La Tentation* occupies an anomalous place in his corpus, a novel written as though it were drama. As a play, it is almost unproducible; as a novel, it is startling yet intriguing. The typography is, as befits a play, varied by the function of the particular part of the text (dialogue, stage directions, quotations, etc.); it is, nevertheless divided into chapters like a novel (chapters rather than acts because there is no explicit separation into numbered scenes).

*La Tentation* incorporates questions of religion and insanity that were prevalent in late nineteenth-century France, though the novel is set in third-century C.E. Egypt. When insanity expresses itself via religious obsession, where is the dividing line between madness and faith? Can one masquerade as the other? Flaubert's own extensive, even exhaustive, research into both madness and religious and theological history gave him the background necessary to understand and reveal the complex interactions and contradictions between these, as did his own native skepticism. Gothot-Mersch insists that in his correspondence Flaubert clearly showed "la haine des dogmes, de la pretension à detenir la vérité" (24); because of this, perhaps, he investigated every Christian sect and non-Christian religion he referred to, as he scrupulously noted down in his "calepins" (273-285). Though not a subject treated in his notebooks, Flaubert found psychological

authenticity essential to his writing; see for example his correspondence with Guy de Maupassant (Flaubert and Franklin-Grout 279, 354).

Criticism on Flaubert abounds, even on a text of lesser stature such as *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Among others, Claudine Gothot-Mersch (the editor of the Folio critical edition of the novel) is very useful in terms of structure and influences, as is the older critic Jean Seznec, author of various essays about specific surreal “episodes” in the novel. There are many treatments of the role and nature of religion in the novel, ranging from Foucault’s insistence that the visions represent challenges to Antoine’s faith via competing truths (Foucault 29) to complete reimaginings such as Mary Orr’s contention that Flaubert represents Antoine as a “true free-thinker” (Orr 115). Even so, there is a reluctance in the critical literature to suggest that Antoine’s delusional tendencies and his religiosity are two sides of the same coin, or to infer any causal connection between religion and madness other than the truism that religion can be an outlet for insanity. I personally suggest that Saint Antoine’s devoutness and his propensity for hallucination are related forms of a rejection of a disturbing mundane reality.

In *La Tentation* Flaubert describes a character who turns logic on its head and justifies his delusional experience by appealing to supernatural authority, in this case church doctrine. This phenomenon is not, however confined to religion. In the nineteenth century, such movements as mesmerism and spiritualism provided a putatively scientific version of the justification of insane behavior by experts in their explanations of supernatural phenomena. Such is the case with “Le Horla,” one of the more prominent short stories by Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) and the second work analyzed in Chapter II. “Le Horla” dates from the 1880s, when Maupassant was writing copiously

while in the early stages of syphilis and mental imbalance (Maupassant and Bury 373). Many of Maupassant's short stories focus on madness; this is not surprising given that he had an intimate experience with insanity: he died in a private mental asylum suffering from "une paralysie générale progressive," i.e., severe mental degeneration, that had made him "animalisé" – an irrational animal (Mirliton 1).

"Le Horla" is written as a series of first-person diary entries charting the mental decline of the protagonist whose nervous condition leads him deeper and deeper into delusions and hallucinations of an invisible supernatural creature – the eponymous "Horla" – culminating in an attempt to kill the creature by burning down his own house. As it happens, the protagonist only succeeds in accidentally killing his servants, and the story ends with him contemplating suicide on the theory that this will destroy the Horla as well as himself. The tale did not start out in diary form; the first version of "Le Horla" appeared in 1886 in the periodical *Gil Blas* as a third-person narration by an alienist framing quotations from a journal by the sufferer, who in the 1887 version became the protagonist. The frame structure of the 1886 version allowed Maupassant to comment to his audience upon the madman's experience, to have the alienist declare it possibly insane and possibly prophetic; the 1887 diary form, however, leaves this interpretive work completely to the reader. This change between the two versions adds an ambiguity that encourages uncertainty in the reader, even though the later form is essentially simpler and more direct.

Maupassant kept the same title in both versions, and in its own way it foreshadows the hallucinatory nature of the story. "Le Horla" is a neologism, Maupassant's invention for the protagonist's theorized – or more likely imaginary – supernatural creature. No



one really knows the origin of the word; entire essays are dedicated to speculation about the question.<sup>5</sup> The fantastic nature of the story suits the exotic sound of the creature's name. "Le Horla" is frequently termed a fantastical tale, as in Le Livre de Poche's collection entitled *Le Horla et autres récits fantastiques*. It is, however, much more than that: "Le Horla" is a *réaliste* account of progressive madness, yet at the same time it has unexpected elements of science fiction in the protagonist's belief that the Horla comes from other stars, a more advanced being who is here to supplant humanity.

It is not just Maupassant's startlingly vivid and realistic depiction of progressive insanity that goes beyond the norms of polite society; he also destabilizes the reader by probing the illogical logic that underlies the madman's rationalization of his visions and obsessions. The protagonist's progress toward ultimate derangement occurs in a step-by-step process where each decision (taken in isolation) appears understandable, even semi-rational, but taken as a whole is a portrait of descent into total madness. The reader is carried along on this descent into insanity without quite realizing how he or she arrived there.

Criticism on "Le Horla" often focuses either on the physical causes of the protagonist's disorder, even in scientific publications (Marcelo Miranda 578-580), or on the existential qualities of the work (innumerable). Some works discuss clinical psychology and Maupassant's interest in medical psychology à la Charcot (Marquer). None makes the specific connections that I do between religious doctrine and a supernatural world-view in the context of Maupassant and his fiction. In theory, religion

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, André Vial's *Maupassant et l'art du roman* (1954), and Marie-Claire Bancquart in *Le Horla et autres contes cruels et fantastiques* (1976), among others.

and spiritualism are very nearly antithetical; in practice, both reflect a magical view of the universe, where that which is outside of typical human experience is from elsewhere, rather than being a creation of the human mind. It is this latter view that I favor, seeing significant similarities between a Catholic and paranormal view of the universe. The significant element to me in both this text and *La Tentation* is the desire to escape the stresses of the world as it was in 1887 and the distorted nature of the path their authors delineate for their protagonists' quests to resolve this conflict.

In Chapter III, I turn away from the supernatural and toward more self-obsessed notions of reality; the first work discussed in this section is *Les chants de Maldoror*. This text is a paradoxical work in many ways: it is infamous yet obscure; a creation of the Second Empire yet an icon of late nineteenth-century avant-garde literature; quintessentially Parisian yet by an author born and raised in Uruguay; and simultaneously an exercise in rhetoric and a showcase of *fin de siècle* models of insanity. Isidore Ducasse, writing under the invented *nom de plume* of the “Comte de Lautréamont,” was the son of a French diplomatic official in Montevideo, Uruguay, though educated in France. At the *lycée* in Tarbes he studied rhetoric and philosophy, and therefore was well-prepared to both know and break the boundaries of both conventional morality and conventional literary construction. In fact, in a foreshadowing of his later literary publication, the other students of his *lycée* labeled him as a “philosophe incompréhensibiliste” (Jean-Jacques Lefrère 259).

*Les chants de Maldoror* recounts, in a non-linear fashion, snippets of the life and visions of the title character. Here and there a narrator appears, but it is often (and I will argue deliberately) unclear whether Ducasse is attributing the narrative descriptions to

this narrating voice or to the character of Maldoror. The author gives his protagonist the attributes and tones which *fin de siècle* psychological literature would term insane and which frequently involve violence. These characterizations resonate in turn with narrative and structural oddities prevalent in the work: transgressions of mores, internal logic, plot, genre, and voice, among other elements. Ducasse's work was so inflammatory that the first draft of the "Chant Premier" was, according to his cousin Amélie, burned by his godfather's confessor in the local cathedral of Córdoba, Argentina (301).

The first canto was initially published in 1868 separately, by Bilitout, as a 30-centime pamphlet by an anonymous author, at Ducasse's own expense (327). Ducasse had to send the text out for review to the literary world himself, as well as sending it (in vain) to Victor Hugo for commentary (329-330). Eventually, the complete work appeared in 1869 under the auspices of the Belgian publisher Albert Lacroix. Once again, Ducasse had to subsidize the publication of his fiction, this time at a cost of 400 FF (Lautréamont 462). It was banned in France, and the author thought that the book would be published in Switzerland and Belgium; in fact, only twenty copies of *Les chants de Maldoror* were so produced (463). Only in 1870 were copies actually available for purchase in France, and the work was largely ignored until the mid-1880s. In 1885 the symbolist Max Waller "discovered" Ducasse's text and promoted it among his friends, including Joris-Karl Huysmans and Leon Bloy (464).

Amongst other peculiarities, *Les chants de Maldoror* has no single recognizable form; it is a mock epic that contains a self-described "petit roman." There are (for the first five sections) cantos, epic invocations, and formula phrases that, though in prose,

echo the classical construction of an epic; these, disappear however once the subsidiary “novel” appears in chant #6. This last section has a narrative arc and story<sup>6</sup> where the first five have none (or at least no discernible order or consistent duration). The first five cantos are episodic in nature but demonstrate no real growth or intelligible transformation in the character of Maldoror; the protagonist’s criminally insane exploits and delusions are left to hold the reader’s interest. Ducasse is just as ready to violate common mores as he is to violate typical narrative development. He makes Maldoror a murdering pedophile, a delusional bully who assaults those he dislikes or despises – including God – and has his main character revel in slander, violence, and the crueler aspects of nature. In *Les chants de Maldoror*, Ducasse creates an individual whose mind and behavior are incompatible with societal norms of the time and who fits various criteria for madness as laid out in late nineteenth-century psychological theories.

The criticism on *Maldoror* is wide-ranging; many works of criticism involve the possible presence of insanity or delusion in the characterization of the eponymous persona, but discussion of criminal insanity *per se* is rare, as are comparisons with *fin de siècle* psychological models on their own terms, uninformed by later Freudian analysis or modern psychiatric theories. Even when critics refer to *fin de siècle* psychological models in discussing the nature of the character Maldoror, there is a decided tendency to invoke the question of Ducasse’s own mental state. Jean-Pierre Soulier, for example, in 1962 did discuss correspondence between the text of Maldoror and nineteenth-century

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<sup>6</sup> The Oxford *Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines this latter as “the full sequence of events as we imagine them to have taken place in their ‘natural’ order and duration” Baldick, Chris. “plot”. *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edition 3rd 2008, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-885>.

psycho-medical classifications, but did so in order to prove that the author was schizophrenic.<sup>7</sup> There is also, unsurprisingly, a great deal of analysis of Ducasse's language, but little regarding rhetoric in terms of argument; one exception to this is Ora Avni's *Tics, tics et tics figures, syllogismes, récit dans Les Chants de Maldoror*. The literary influence of Ducasse's work, while real and significant, is yet another point in criticism that has little if any relevance to my analysis. In general, the questions of interest to me are largely unaddressed in the critical literature, leaving the field open for me to examine Ducasse's text (as an experiment in literary form, not a revelation of authorial madness) in connection with the psychological theories of his own time.

*Les chants de Maldoror* is not the only *fin de siècle* French novel to create a protagonist to be, by the standards of the time, criminally insane; in the second work I analyze in Chapter II, *L'Ève future* (1886), Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1838-1889) takes a less graphic, more subtle approach. While *L'Ève future* is still similarly based in contemporary theories and models of pathological and criminal madness, it omits the blood and public criminal acts of *Maldoror*. Instead, Villiers purports to be telling a story about the "Wizard of Menlo Park," the famous engineer and inventor Thomas A. Edison. The author is careful to point out in the novel's "Avis aux lecteurs" that he is using the idea of Edison rather than the real-life celebrity; he relies on the public's previous knowledge of Edison to establish his character and draws on Edison's reputation as an arrogant, brusque genius to form a foundation for his portrayal of a self-obsessed individual whose behavior reflects his own desires and whims rather than societal standards of responsible and virtuous behavior. Villiers manipulates literary convention

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<sup>7</sup> *Lautréamont, génie ou maladie mentale?*, published by Droz

and expectation with as much dexterity as Ducasse but is a great deal more subtle in his techniques.

Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, a prolific author, was from an aristocratic, albeit debt-ridden, family. His corpus consists almost entirely of short stories and drama; *L'Ève future* is his only novel. The narrative was originally a *feuilleton* published in the periodical *La Vie moderne* between July 18, 1885 and March 27, 1886, with several interruptions due to Villiers' delays while reworking the text (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 381). In May of 1886, the complete novel was published by Maurice de Brunhoff in two small print runs, one of 1000-1100 copies and one of 500 (382); in its own time, the book was not widely known. Friends of Villiers sent Edison himself a copy of the novel, hoping that the latter would be willing to meet Villiers at the 1889 Paris Exhibition (Raitt 354). There was no reply, however, so Edison either never looked at it or was simply indifferent to the work.

As mentioned, *L'Ève future* features Thomas Edison as its main character; Villiers has Edison create a female automaton in his underground workshop and place it at the service of a young friend in exchange for being able to involve his friend Ewald's love interest in his experiment. Villiers has Edison create a complete being, though it takes two separate real women plus the mechanical body to create the single artificial product, the so-called "Andréide". To be more than a simple generic mechanical woman, the body must have the appearance and temperament copied from an actual person and use the spirit of yet another female, one with mediumistic talent. Inevitably, identity theft and (later) spiritual and bodily death form strong themes in the work. Villiers has Edison insist that once his Andréide has taken on an appearance identical to an individual

woman, the automaton can replace the living creature (specifically, Ewald's *innamorata* Miss Alicia Clary); if the Andréide suffers harm, unfortunately, the mediumistic woman providing her spirit is endangered, possibly fatally. Edison, as the motive force behind questionable actions and destructive consequences, is Villiers' hidden criminal. By the psychological standards of medico-legal psychology current in the late nineteenth century, the character of Edison is criminally insane, but reveals this only behind closed doors or in his own mind. Remy de Gourmont claimed that "Villiers fut de son temps au point que tous ses chefs-d'oeuvre sont des rêves solidement basés sur la science et sur la métaphysique modernes" (Gourmont *Livre des masques* 90). The truth of this assertion is clear from reading *L'Ève future*; late nineteenth-century science plays a major role in the novel, if occasionally twisted or deliberately misconstrued, and the presence and descriptions of a spiritualist medium convey a sense of the metaphysical preoccupations of the time.

There is actually a fair amount of criticism dealing with Villiers and insanity, though much of it is about his other works, particularly his short stories (e.g., *Contes cruels*) and certain of his plays (e.g., *Axël*). *L'Ève future* receives a certain attention as well, in the context both of Positivism and of the role of women. Those works of criticism that deal with clinical insanity tend to focus on hysteria (as Bertrand Marquer does in his generally very useful *Romans de la Salpêtrière*). One critic who stands out in the exploration of both lunacy and paratext in Villiers is Gwenhaël Ponnau, whose book *La folie dans la littérature fantastique* (1997) lucidly discusses the intersection mentioned by Gourmont between science, metaphysics, and Villiers' times. Ponnau also, in *L'Ève future ou l'œuvre en question* (2000), specifically engages the role of certain types of paratext

(typography and epigraphs) and irony in the novel. Ponnau's important work uses a great many late nineteenth-century works on psychology, but does so largely in relation to a larger contrast between science and idealism; he does not specifically address *criminal* psychology, and he touches only briefly on how Villiers' character of Edison exemplifies megalomania ("*folie de grandeurs*"). My analysis situates *L'Ève future* in a context of contemporary psycho-pathology; in addition, while Ponnau acknowledges that Villiers uses rhetoric and paratext at certain points to deliberately destabilize the reader, he does not contend as I do that the structure and rhetorical techniques Villiers used were meant to create *consistent* instability in the reader. I will build on the major criticism on *L'Ève future* to investigate the criminally pathological attributes that Villiers fashioned for his protagonist and explore how the author constructed his narrative in a manner that would keep his readers off balance.

As I demonstrate in Chapter III, not all responses to disquieting change involve unsolicited alterations of mental state; some individuals actively seek out something to alter their consciousness and experience a different "reality," as is the case in *À Rebours* and *Les Contes d'un buveur d'éther*. The author of *À rebours*, Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), is an eternally problematic figure in French literature; he was the "father of decadence," yet is also decidedly minor canon. He is a difficult author with affiliations to multiple literary movements; most of his early works are uncompromisingly Naturalistic (e.g., *Marthe, histoire d'une fille*, *En ménage*) while those from the middle of his career are Decadent, Realist, or both (*À Rebours*, *En Rade*, *Là-Bas*), and his later novels are definitely religious in tone (e.g., *L'Oblat*, *Saint Lydwine de Scheidam*). No one doubts, however, that Huysmans was a keen student of human nature in both its prosaic and



problematic forms. While *À rebours* (1884) is often called a manifesto of decadence, it is also a vivid portrait of “*la névrose*,” the “maladie du siècle” (not to be confused with the Romantics’ “mal du siècle”). “*Névrose*” is a particularly nineteenth-century concept, not translatable by the later word “neurosis,” but closer to the idea of instability with a tendency to nervous breakdowns. In Chapter III, I explore this concept at further length using contemporary psychological models and definitions.

The protagonist of *À Rebours*, Jean des Esseintes, is an unstable and sensitive aristocrat from a decaying family. The majority of the novel consists of Huysmans’ depiction of his protagonist’s attempts to find an eccentric lifestyle that does not leave him bored or prone to other symptoms of *névrose*. This quest is an episodic journey through the permutations of decadence and *bizarrierie*. Huysmans has des Esseintes become an addict of aesthetics: the author portrays his protagonist with manias for art, luxury, and delusion over the course of the narrative; he is, in the words of Mark Micale’s work on male hysteria, “plagued by apathy and exhaustion” (Micale 209). Huysmans never lets des Esseintes lose his *névrose*, no matter what type of sensory gratification the character embraces, even (at the end of the novel) Catholicism. Shocking as such a portrait might seem to us now, it reflects psychological conditions under study in late nineteenth-century psychology: *névrose*, the hysteria mentioned above, atavism, and hereditary insanity, among others. Huysmans’ structural manipulations are subtle; rather than blurring form or narrative focus, he adds uncertainty to constructs and perceptions of time and sequence in the narrative. The author mixes narration of des Esseintes’ memories with accounts of the protagonist’s present situation and his timeless musings upon art, literature, and aesthetics in a sequence that is frequently cryptic; this temporal

confusion reflects the intellectual and emotional confusion of Huysmans' protagonist. The structural reinforcement of theme allows the reader to enter deeper into des Esseintes' *névrose* than a mere description of the condition would allow.

In 1884 Huysmans still had a reputation as a Naturalist and follower of Émile Zola; this changed in May of that year, when Charpentier published *À Rebours*. Huysmans and Zola became more distant with one another (Huysmans 377), and Huysmans continued his idiosyncratic literary development in a direction that Gourmont described in 1896: "Il ne s'agissait plus tant de faire entrer dans l'Art, par la représentation, l'extériorité brute, que de tirer de cette extériorité même des motifs de rêve et de surélévation intérieure" (Gourmont *Livre des masques* 196). The contrast is indeed striking between the Naturalistic concept of art as meticulous representation of the external details of life encoding the nature of humanity and what Huysmans shows in *À Rebours* – internal life, the life of mind and emotion, creating the external context. A few years later, Huysmans began to become religious, eventually converting fully to Catholicism and remaining Catholic until his death. In 1904, during the time of Huysmans' intense piety, the author wrote a new preface to *À Rebours*, "écrite vingt ans après le roman" (Huysmans 45-59). In this preface, Huysmans condemns Naturalism and Zola, gives an account of his motives for writing the novel, and praises Catholicism. The 1904 edition of *À Rebours* has a bit of a curious flavor when a reader takes the original text and the later preface together.

There is no lack of criticism on *À Rebours*; there are interpretations and analyses concentrating on art, psychology, medicine, literary history, occultism, religion, and many other domains of knowledge. Almost any history of society or literature of the late

nineteenth-century is sure to discuss the novel, often in a psychological context. Much of the psychological analysis and contextualization underlines the presence of *névrose* in *À rebours*,<sup>8</sup> though the word itself rarely appears. Though critics agree that des Esseintes is fleeing *fin de siècle* French society in general and that he is escaping into sensuality and imagination, I have found few critics who consider that Huysmans might have deliberately made his protagonist derivative as well as depraved. Similarly, the idea of possible addiction to aesthetics or excess is absent in the criticism. I will argue that des Esseintes is taking refuge in excess and an exaggerated version of the aesthetic movement that becomes a habit similar to drug addiction.

There were decadent authors (like Robert de Montesquiou) in late nineteenth-century France even before the publication of *À Rebours*, and there were certainly more after him. One of the most colorful, if not most prominent, was the satiric journalist and eccentric *romancier* Jean Lorrain (1885-1906), a “dandy de la fange.” Antoine de Baecque characterizes Lorrain as “Bref, une parfait figure du Paris fin de siècle...Lorrain conçoit sa vie et son apparence comme une œuvre d’art et de provocation pure” (Lorrain and Baecque 82-83). Baecque is not being hyperbolic; given Lorrain’s proclivities for drugs, theater, *outré* fashion, and waspish wit, he was a provocative and artistic *fin de siècle* literary figure. Indeed, in the middle of Lorrain’s writing career (1898), Remy de Gourmont described him in very similar terms; he admiringly explained Lorrain as “enclin à la maraude, aux excursions vers les mondes du parisianisme louche” (Gourmont *Le 2e livre des Masques*. 60). Huysmans actually corresponded with Lorrain, who passionately admired the author of *À Rebours*. According to Lorrain’s biographer

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Micale’s 2008 *Hysterical Men* and Christopher Partridge’s 2008 *High Culture*

Thibaut d'Anthonay, Huysmans admired Lorrain's talent and loathed his personal life in equal measure (Anthonay 540).

Lorrain's world in the 1890s was a Parisian one, and it is there that he set *Contes d'un buveur d'éther*, a set of loosely connected short stories; the *Contes*, though a collection itself, actually forms a section of an even larger collection, *Sensations et souvenirs*. The *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* present just as much excessive and addictive behavior as *À Rebours*, but through the lens of decadent drug use rather than decadent aesthetics. The stories connect through ether use and the recurrence of several characters. Serge Allitof is an ether addict and the subject of multiple stories as either a current addict, a recovering addict, or a possibly relapsing addict; his friend de Jacquels is a sometime user and aesthete à la des Esseintes, but with a more satirical and less credulous nature. Lorrain explores drug-induced and decadent hallucinations at length in the *Contes*, including narrative homages to both *À Rebours* and Maupassant's "Le Horla." In addition, he dedicates the first of the *Contes* ("Le mauvais gîte") explicitly to Huysmans and makes Allitof a fan of the occult and esoteric art, much like des Esseintes (or possibly Huysmans himself).

Lorrain's love of ambiguity led him to make the narrative focus of the *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* malleable, unlike in *À Rebours*. There is usually some sort of narrator, though sometimes the narrating voice serves as a frame for other first-person narration and sometimes not; in certain stories there is a third-person narrative focus but, once again, this is often a frame for more limited first-person accounts. Like Huysmans, however, Lorrain plays with time in the *Contes*; there is a very vague sequence, but not all the stories fit into it comprehensibly. Even those tales that do fall into the chronology

do so with jumps in time within stories, here overlapping, there skipping periods of time. Lorrain pushed limits in his work apart from the structural oddities; drug use, while hardly *verboten* in late nineteenth-century France, was still a socially controversial topic.<sup>9</sup> Readers who might not be intrigued by clinical accounts of drug hallucinations would be titillated by accounts of *demi-mondaine* or artistic addict life, though the etheric visions are surreal enough to satisfy a lover of *Les Chants de Maldoror*.

Charpentier, who had published previous works by Lorrain, released the *Contes* in 1895, to popular interest but little critical attention. Perhaps due to the work's drama and sensationalistic flavor, here is a decided dearth of critical works on the *Contes d'un buveur d'éther*; there appears to be only one critical edition (press of the Mercure de France), and that is to say the least sparse. Instead of the usual panoply of critical apparatus, that 2015 edition contains notes, a florid and mostly biographical Preface, and a summary bibliography (all of 8 works). Other works by Lorrain have more complete critical editions and have received more academic attention (Lorrain's novel *Monsieur de Phocas*, for example). Even social historians seem to give the work short shrift: *High Mysticism* doesn't even mention Lorrain, and *Hysterical Men* only makes one vague reference. If works on decadent culture and late nineteenth-century masculine psychology do not address Lorrain, there is unquestionably a need for reevaluation. I would assert that the *Contes d'un buveur d'éther*, far from being merely a florid artifact of decadence or a symptom of one man's own psychological difficulties, offers a fascinating insight into *névrose*, addiction, and the need for a solution to society's ills among the artistic intelligentsia of the *fin de siècle*.

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<sup>9</sup> see Partridge's *High Culture*

In the texts I have selected, theme and structure form a mutually reinforcing *entrelacement* that both intellectually and viscerally conveys madness and instability. There is no dearth in *fin de siècle* France of fictional texts treating mental pathology and its sufferers; the six works I have chosen to examine go beyond simple descriptions of such individuals and their socio-economic *milieu*; these six authors chose instead to explore in various ways the contemporary psychological models of pathology and their connections to behaviors focused on the denial of empirical reality. I posit that in these narratives, change promotes madness when individuals seek answers in superficialities and the claims of others while ignoring the real questions and outcomes hidden beneath easy fixes. In other words, these seekers display an addiction to “appearance,” clinging to false certainty in their quest to resolve social and personal instability. This is the essence of “mad certainty.”

## CHAPTER II

### OTHER-WORLDFLY CERTAINTY: RELIGIOUS DELUSION AND “HIGHER TRUTH” – *LA TENTATION DE SAINTE ANTOINE* AND “LE HORLA”

In *La Tentation de saint Antoine* and “Le Horla,” Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant created protagonists who have a particular method of searching for certainty: conflating fantasies with reality and preferring to interpret what they perceive and experience through the apodictic lens of dogma or ideology. In their pretensions to certainty Saint Antoine and “Le Horla”’s nameless narrator drive themselves toward madness as they force the irreconcilable notions of “higher” truth and empirical reality into a pernicious association.

To represent this contrast between the protagonists’ mad point of view and the saner – or at least more removed – perceptions of the reader, I can turn to Olbrechts-Tyteca’s “philosophical pairs” (*couples philosophiques*)<sup>10</sup>. Her model pair is  $\frac{\text{apparence}}{\text{réalité}}$ ; we can create a pair that expresses this in a manner more suited to examining the relationships of internal and external perceptions:  $\frac{\text{surface}}{\text{objectif}}$ <sup>11</sup>. In the context of *La Tentation* and “Le Horla,” the “surface” is ‘faith,’<sup>12</sup> i.e., belief in a system that uses authority and/or doctrine – here, both religion and the occult – to achieve certainty instead of using evidence and/or skepticism to concede uncertainty and instability. While it may seem

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<sup>10</sup> Specifically, I draw on her 1979 expansion on and revision of the concept from 1958

<sup>11</sup> “objectif” as a noun, with the sense of Objectif 1.C.1.a from the TLFi “Qui relève d’une réalité indépendante, extérieure à l’esprit et susceptible d’être connue par les sens “ and its medical extension «Qui peut être perçu par un observateur autre que le malade.»

<sup>12</sup> The OED’s definition of Faith III.5 “Belief in and acceptance of the doctrines of a religion ... the capacity to spiritually apprehend divine truths, or realities beyond the limits of perception or of logical proof” Dictionary, Oxford English. “*faith, n. and int.*”. Oxford University Press.

that faith is a counter-intuitive choice for both “appearance” and internal perception, but it is appropriate as a contrast to the notion of reality as an empirical construct; faith is ultimately antithetical to empirical proof and dependent upon the believer’s personal devotion. Thus, a “higher truth” in terms of faith is essentially what Nicole Edelman calls a new (or superior) “état de la matière,” characteristic of those who are “accrochés à leurs certitudes”. The combination of faith’s “higher truth” and skepticism that is present in both *La Tentation* and “Le Horla” allow us to make the pair  $\frac{\text{surface}}{\text{objectif}}$  even yet more specific:  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . It is, however, vital to note at this point that the use of “higher truth” for term 1 and “empirical reality” for term 2 characterizes the **external** perception, i.e. that of the audience. The **internal**, possibly insane pair is the **inverse** – “empirical reality” is term 1 and “higher truth” is term 2:  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ . For the audience, when examining the protagonists – and for the protagonists themselves in their moments of lucidity – the “higher truth” of faith is what they see initially, an appearance that hides reality; skepticism is the true reality, one that the audience and protagonist must maintain in order to discover their rationality. It is just the opposite in the case of the protagonist in his fits of insanity. He perceives uncertain, empirical reality as a superficial illusion and the “higher truth” of faith as true reality that only one who truly *believes* can discern.

Both pieces of fiction present the conflict between faith and skepticism as essentially irreconcilable; the popular belief, the *lieu commun* equates faith’s “higher truth” and “empirical reality.” The dissociative philosophical pairs represent the dissociation of the *lieu commun*, their fundamental incompatibility and the progression of the relationship



between the interior and exterior perceptions by demonstrating the unstable equilibrium between the associated elements.

$$\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}} \rightleftharpoons \frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$$

To achieve sanity, the elements of the *lieu commun* that binds them together must dissolve. To Flaubert and Maupassant, it is vital for the audience to realize that faith's "higher truth" is not equivalent to empirical reality; their association is pernicious, and leads to insanity.

In these narratives, the unstable equilibrium between the two inverse philosophical pairs depends on the interlacing of theme and structure as well. Flaubert and Maupassant both fashion their manipulations of the reader with the dissociation of interior and exterior interpretations of the events and transformations in the story. In terms of manipulation of the exterior perspective, these authors are able to draw their readers into the protagonists' mental instability at certain points, luring them into these characters' inverted philosophical pairing (empirical reality as term 1, "higher truth" as term 2) for brief periods at certain times. These same manipulations of theme and structure also reveal periodic inversion in the interior perspective; in the moments of the protagonists' lucidity, they experience what the exterior observer (i.e. the reader) observes ("higher truth" as term 1 and empirical reality as term 2).

Note that the separation between interior and exterior pairings is the difference in perception of, and opinion regarding, the relationship of the two dissociated elements making up the philosophical pairs: "higher truth" and empirical reality. We can observe this relationship in both theme and structure.

Let us begin with consideration of theme. The essence of the theme in terms of interior versus exterior is a contrast between the protagonist's struggle to keep seeing the "higher truth" as an essential underlying reality and empirical reality as a mere superficial illusion (as doctrine demands); at the same time, the reader's distance and skepticism is determined to maintain a perspective on the same events that is outside the protagonist's inversion and separate from the character's insanity.

RELIGIOUS DELUSION, HIGHER TRUTH – *LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE*

One of the most intriguing aspects of *La Tentation* is its form; it is a novel that is structured as a play, albeit one that would be impractical to actually perform. As is frequently the case in drama, the narrative focus (such as there is) is third person, but neither omniscient nor center of consciousness; the author provides the audience with no access to any character's thoughts. Thus, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the author from the narrative focus. The protagonist is, however, clearly separate from the author or narrative focus. While Flaubert has deliberately fashioned a character with a particular psychology, the audience can only discover the protagonist's psychological state through his words and actions. To shape the saint's state of mind and mental idiosyncrasies, Flaubert centered his narrative around Saint Antoine's visions; recurring patterns are the thematic strands that characterize and link Saint these various visions. While important repeated images and tropes fill the narrative, here I shall be exploring the unstable equilibrium of Antoine's reactions to the elements of the cycle of "temptations". These "temptations" are simultaneously his visions (or hallucinations) and the lure of rejecting perception based on empirical reality and forcing "higher truth" into the role of fundamental certainty. Putting aside half of this fascinating double definition for the

moment, we shall explore the “visions” aspect of the temptations without yet examining Antoine’s reactions to them. Excluding his first and last “visions,” if we assume that there can be multiple ones connected to a particular theme in a single chapter, the general schema for these<sup>13</sup> (as displayed in Table 1) would be:

1. The arrival of the vision signaled by a change in the identity of speaking characters (appearance, disappearance, replacement); Flaubert generally identifies them for the reader, though at this point not for Antoine.
2. Visual representation of the setting and/or “characters”
3. Expansion by the characters of the chapter’s theme, either mixed with or preceding #4
4. Antoine’s changing reactions and responses

Chapter I does not actually begin with a vision; in fact, it is the only chapter lacking a vision per se. Instead, it creates expectations in the audience for several essential aspects of the novel to come. Firstly, it sets the novel’s temporal, spatial, and biographical context; not only do Antoine’s extensive reminiscences tell the reader when, where, and who the novel is about, but it creates expectations of how closely Flaubert will follow the “traditional” accounts of Antoine’s life and temptations, those that the audience would already know from their schooling.<sup>14</sup> From the beginning Flaubert establishes the initial assumptions regarding empirical reality based in observation and common experience and faith’s “higher truth” that he expects both the reader and Antoine to work from. This chapter has a secondary purpose as well: as Evelyn Gould has noted, it introduces the audience to a number of the themes that will follow in other chapters, giving the reader a hint of the types of temptations to which Antoine may be

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<sup>13</sup> starting in Chapter II.B and not including the last vision in Chapter VII

<sup>14</sup> Athanasius’ biography of Antoine, the entry on him in *The Golden Legend*, various iconography, etc.

particularly susceptible (e.g. lust, wealth, renown) or, in other words, those to which he will eventually circle back (Gould 130).

Table 1: Individual “visions” in *La Tentation*

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Dominant theme of chapter</i>	<i>Visions</i>	
I	Preview of later chapters	A	Introduction, reminiscence
		B	Aural invitation to temptation
II	Traditional hagiographic temptations	A	Mirroring visions in biographies of St. Antoine
		B	Reine de Saba
III	Doctrinal challenges	Hilarion	
IV	Heresiarchs	A	Heretical leaders
		B	Small groups of other heretics
		C	Simon Magus & Helen of Troy
		D	Apollonius & Damis
V	Comparative religions	A	Hilarion
		B	Buddha
		C	Dying gods 1
		D	Hilarion
		E	Dying gods 2
VI	The Devil & physics	Exploration of the physical universe	
VII	Monsters & biology	A	Allegorical women
		B	Monsters
		C	Biology & resolution

Between the explicit content of Antoine's soliloquy and the tropes set up by a reader's previous knowledge, the latter has reason to expect typical hagiography with particular types of temptations and can assume that this work as a piece of hagiography will affirm doctrinal Catholic views of the association of faith and reality. Chapter II eases the reader into the visions themselves, evolving from typical "temptations" found in nearly every account of Antoine's life into a more atypical incident with the Queen of Sheba. This is the beginning of the aforementioned "schema" of visions, a pattern that is much more complex than the traditional hagiography of Saint Antoine. The themes are not always clearly separated or fully confined to separate sections (or even chapters). The thematic bleeding between chapters and sections – and therefore between visions – serves to continuously reaffirm the mirage-like qualities of faith's "higher truth" and thus to reinforce its status as a term 1, an instance of misleading "appearance."

Despite the importance of the hallucinatory aspect of Antoine's "temptations," the other, intellectual, half of the definition of "temptation" is utterly essential. In contrast to the traditional hagiographies of Saint Antoine, Flaubert's protagonist vacillates incessantly between blind faith and amorphous doubt. It is doubt that is temptation, the temptation to reject the domination of empirical reality by faith's "higher truth," and therefore the temptation to reject madness. By this logic, Antoine's triumphs of faith are truly triumphs of madness and illogical inversions, while his episodes of doubt are lucid glimpses of the empirical reality underlying the visions "higher truth" gives him. He is a protagonist locked in a cycle of illusory self-discovery and arbitrary "knowledge" (Gould 132).

With each new vision, Antoine has another perspective from which he *could* detect the irrationality of his inversion of the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{surface}}{\text{objectif}}$ . What he actually does is to constantly make, break, and exchange elements of the  $\frac{\text{surface}}{\text{objectif}}$  during his spasms of doubt. When Antoine wavers under “temptation,” he demonstrates these doubts and becomes uncertain of which element (“higher truth” or empirical reality) is the surface illusion and which is the term expressing the fundamental nature of the world. His doubts manifest as curiosity, guilt, confusion, or fear, while his rejection of doubt appears generally in anger or fanatical prayer. Chapter IV, featuring the heresiarchs, has several telling instances of both. Caught up in a whirlwind of heretical assertions and arguments (by such figures as Arius, Pope Calixtus, and numerous choruses of sects), Antoine interjects at one moment a note of bewilderment in response to Gnostic claims about the relationship of the Father and the Son: “Qu’est-ce que donc le Verbe?... Qu’était Jésus?” (Flaubert 114). The historical Antoine would have been very firm in his doctrinal stance that Jesus was the Word made flesh, but Flaubert’s creation instead expresses doubt by his puzzled interrogatives. Shortly thereafter, Flaubert describes Antoine (surrounded by the heretics) in a manner that heavily implies fear in *addition* to confusion; he states the heresiarchs surround Antoine “qui pleure, la tête dans ses mains” (115). To be brought to cringing tears Antoine must be at the very least intimidated by the circle of heretical figures. After a quick appearance by a caricatured Jew, the changeable saint then denies his doubts (to himself), replacing them with ferocious righteousness, commanding – insisting – “Docteurs, magiciens, évêques et diacres, hommes et fantômes, arrière! arrière! Vous êtes tous des mensonges!” (116). The author constantly reinforces the

disturbing nature of doubt and the lack of certainty in the rational world; Antoine is particularly distressed by this instability, and must use zealous anger to push out the turmoil and restore his picture of “higher truth” to its comforting and familiar place as the formative term 2.

Despite the power of this phenomenon, Flaubert provides Antoine with regular, frequent opportunities for a courageous, or at least evolving, realization of the inadequacy of dogmatic faith and an evolution toward an appreciation of empirical reality. The author uses several sophisticated techniques to demonstrate these opportunities; in one of the most intriguing strategies, Flaubert has Antoine receive suggestions of numerous alternatives as he observes dialogue *between* the characters of the visions. These dialogues give Antoine yet more opportunities for accepting or rejecting the characters’ arguments and thus re-evaluating his perception of the “higher truth” of faith. The Sphinx and Chimera are particularly notable in this regard. Despite the quasi-comic nature of their dispute, they are clear in their characterizations of their own philosophies. The Sphinx “songe et calcule ;” his gaze is cryptic and mysterious, “tendu à travers les choses sur un horizon inaccessible” (226). “La Chimère,” in contrast, refers to herself as “légère et joyeuse ;” she bestows such outrageous gifts as “les éternelles démenes” and “rêves de gloire” (226). As Vadé points out, in Flaubert’s era, the Sphinx was identified with Enigma while the Chimera had a traditional association with Imagination (Vadé 3-4). Both of these figures represent possible alternatives to rigid Catholic dogma; they have the potential to provoke comparisons on Antoine’s part between the regimented thinking inherent in his faith and such less doctrinaire approaches to the perception of reality.

Such alternatives are intriguing, but Antoine is truculent and rigid enough that he must have open challenges in order to modify his perception of the relationship between “higher truth” and empirical reality. Interestingly, the most powerful objections to Antoine’s pernicious pairing comes from his personal interactions with the Hilarion, his former student, who poses extremely provocative questions regarding dogma – and who engages with no one except Antoine. Hilarion dares Antoine to use skepticism and independent judgement; he challenges the saint with classic issues in Catholic doctrine. Antoine can only reply with weak repetitions of traditional dogma and demonstrates shaken faith when Hilarion rebuts or objects to the saint’s protestations. In response, for example, to Antoine’s claim that the New Testament “resplendit d’une lumière pure,” Hilarion offers examples of the irreconcilability of the Gospels. He includes such difficulties as to whom the angel of the Annunciation appeared (“Cependant, l’ange annocateur, dans Matthieu, apparaît à Joseph, tandis que dans Luc, c’est à Marie”) and what Jesus drank on the cross (“Le breuvage qu’on lui offre sur la croix, c’est, dans Matthieu, du vinaigre avec du fiel, dans Marc du vin et de la myrrhe.”) (Flaubert 94). When Antoine excuses himself from directly confronting scriptural inconsistencies by babbling “Il faudrait beaucoup de temps pour te répondre!” Hilarion raises larger questions. He asks (regarding Jesus) “Pourquoi reçut-il le Saint-Esprit, bien qu’étant le Fils ? Qu’avait-il besoin du baptême s’il était le Verbe ? ... Est-ce que ces pensées-là ne te sont jamais venues ?” (Flaubert 95). Antoine does not even restate the doctrinaire Catholic position on the three-in-one nature of the Trinity but rather seems confounded by the intricacies of the nature of the relationship between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though Flaubert allows such challenges to coax Antoine into doubt and away



from insanity almost despite himself, he protagonist inevitably rejects any possible alteration of his definitions of the superficial and the fundamental. Instead, the author has the saint affirm his mad associations emphatically; the Nicene Creed Antoine recites in response to Hilarion's mention of Emperor Constantine's infidelity to Christianity is both nearly the definition of pure adherence to the "higher truth" of faith and a denial of provable historical fact (189-190).

As the novel progresses and Antoine continues to tighten the bonds of doctrine, more and more hysterically insisting on the great divergence between the strength and purity of "higher truth" and the insubstantial nature empirical reality, his apparent state (from the point of view of the reader) shifts more and more toward insanity. Where the protagonist sees reaffirmation of faith, the audience sees degeneration of rationality.

#### NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF ANTI-DOGMA – *LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE*

The author's treatment of Antoine's orthodoxy and doubts molds the reader's rational and intellectual responses. What, then, is the effect of Flaubert's manipulation of the narrative's plot structure? How does it shape the audience's perceptions? In effect, *La Tentation*'s narrative structure supports and reinforces the theme of faith ("higher truth") as madness challenged by empirical reality, but does so by influencing the reader's emotions and subconscious attitudes rather than his or her higher reasoning. Flaubert creates discontinuities in the expected progress of the plot and perturbations of the level of narrative tension, pushing the audience to viscerally feel the underlying inconsistencies and shifts of Antoine's perceptions of the "higher truth"/"empirical reality" relationship and his consequent insanity. A particularly revealing method of examining the structure of Flaubert's work is by the examination of a graph of plot shape

from both the interior and exterior points of view; the critic can represent this type of curve in terms of “narrative tension” versus progress through the story (Figure 1).<sup>15</sup>

Baroni’s definition of “narrative tension” is particularly appropriate to my theories. He states that

la tension est le phénomène qui sert lorsque l’interprète d’un récit est encouragé à attendre un dénouement, cette attente étant caractérisée par une anticipation teintée d’incertitude qui confère des traits passionnels à l’acte de réception. (Raphaël Baroni 18)

This definition supports my contention that Flaubert deliberately manipulated the structure of his narrative’s plot in order to bypass the reader’s intellectual processes. Consequently, he could subtly provoke profound emotions in his audience in the development of the narrative’s plot. In addition, his techniques induced feelings of instability in his readers much like the state of mind elicited by incongruous philosophical pairs. When one graphically displays this “narrative tension” as a function of the progress of the story, it becomes possible to see the plot points as delineating a curve that models emotional intensity and uncertainty. I have chosen to consider the plot points both in terms of the psychological tension that the author attributes to their protagonist (“internal”) and the tension felt by those who are outside the psychological variations the author creates in their characters (“external”). The “external” point of view is essentially limited to the author themselves and their readers<sup>16</sup>. Thus, I have chosen

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<sup>15</sup> See Raphaël Baroni’s book *La Tension Narrative* and his extensive discussion of types of “courbes” or “pyramides” describing narratives based on “tension” and plot points. Baroni, Raphaël. *La tension narrative : suspense, curiosité et surprise*. Seuil, 2007. *Poétique*.

<sup>16</sup> My definitions of “internal” and “external” differ from Baroni’s “tension interne” and “tension externe;” for him, “tension interne” is the same as “tension narrative,” while “tension externe” refers to non-fictional

for the sake of simplicity to use the terms “reader” and “audience” to represent those who have the “external” point of view. It is important to note as well that the term “internal” corresponds to the pair  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  while “external” corresponds to the pair  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . All graphs show the intensity of tension as the plot moves forward through various plot points from the beginning, through crises or climax, to the dénouement. The representations of external and internal tensions are:

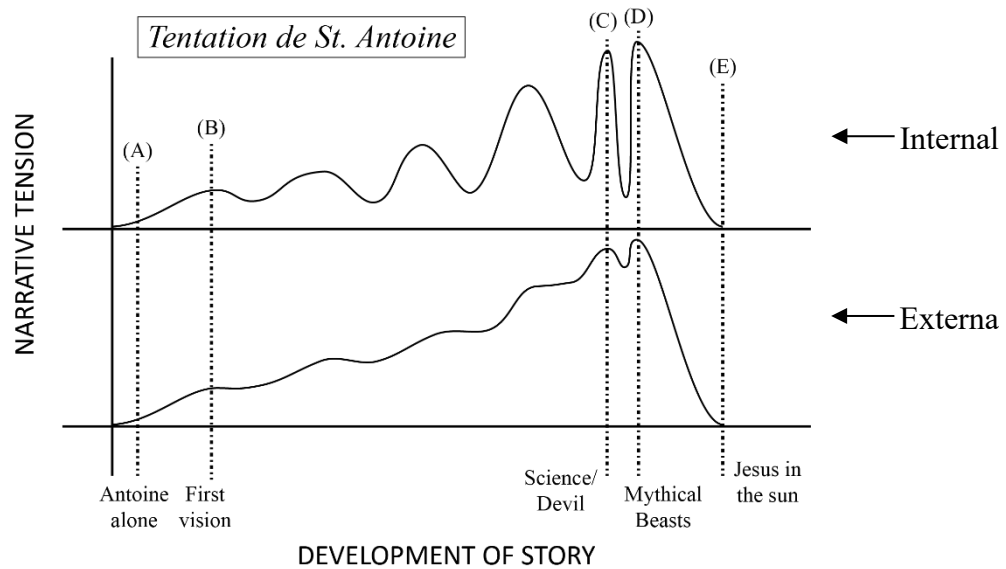


Figure 1: Interior [top] and exterior [bottom] plot shapes – *Tentation*

The interior and exterior graphs have the same set of important plot points: the beginning monologue (A), the first vision (B), the double crisis (C) and (D), and the resolution [E]. Antoine’s introductory soliloquy (point A) establishes an initial level of tension for both the protagonist and the reader. By this monologue Flaubert makes Antoine’s psychological distress perfectly clear, showing a heightened interior tension

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texts without actual narrative. Baroni, Raphaël. "Approches passionnelles et dialogiques de la narrativité." *Cahiers de Narratologie*, no. 14, 2008, doi:10.4000/narratologie.579.

from a very early point in the plot. As soon as Antoine opens his mouth, he gives vent to his depression:

SAINT ANTOINE

... dès que le soleil disparaît, **il pousse un grand soupir**, et regardant l'horizon:

Encore un jour ! un jour de passé !

Autrefois pourtant, je n'étais pas **si misérable** !

(52) [*emphasis mine*]

After Antoine's expressions of woe, but still via his soliloquy, Flaubert expands his depiction of inner conflict, taking the reader along with the protagonist back into memory to review old regrets, guilt, errors, and resentments (52-56).

For a narrative about a saint, Flaubert's introduction of Antoine with pre-existing internal psychological disturbance is very unusual. A typical plot in hagiography, such as the narratives in the work of Athanasius or the account of Antoine's life in the *Golden Legend* is one that would be more likely to match audience expectations. It does not begin with uncertainty and vacillation; as Budge characterizes the Antoine of Athanasius' *Life*, "His disposition was happy, and his faith in God as firm as a rock; no devil, fiend, or phantom could undermine his trust in the goodness of God" (Athanasius and Budge xxix). The atypical interior turmoil Flaubert creates in Antoine provokes unease and increased tension for his readers. The first vision [B] produces yet another jump in the interior tension resulting from Antoine's wildness and lability during his hallucinatory – and chaotic – experience. He swings from ecstatic greed (of gold, he says he "m'en frotter le visage, me coucher dessus!") (Flaubert 68) to homicidal mania ("J'ai besoin de me venger, de frapper, de tuer!") (70). Then he turns frantic masochism; he dramatically addresses his flagellum, saying: "Je voudrais que les gouttes de mon sang jaillissent

jusqu'aux étoiles, fissent craquer mes os, découvrir mes nerfs !" (77) and continues with more declarations ending in exclamation marks (*ibid*). Flaubert attributes perturbation to Antoine, but the reader becomes perturbed as well. In other words, the exterior tension grows. As mentioned previously, the elements of temptation in this first vision correspond relatively closely to those in traditional biographies of Antoine, but his behavior continues to be incongruous when compared to that of the Antoine of hagiography, and disturbingly extreme in general.

It is only after points A and B that the interior and exterior narrative tension curves begin to diverge. Baroni's terminology additionally allows a structural characterization of this pattern with his concept of narrative "micro-structures," each of which incorporates a trigger ("noeud"), a development of tension ("retard") that includes the climax, and a resolution ("denouement") (Raphaël Baroni 137). Visually, the graphs represent these micro-structures by repeating elements of evolution in the level of narrative tension. For each episode of temptation, the change in characters and the introduction of their challenges to Antoine's faith is the trigger; his interaction with them (and their interaction with one another) acts as the development; his ultimate rejection of the temptation – and rationality – is the resolution (or apparent resolution). Though micro-structure patterns appear in the curves for both internal and external tension, they are not identical. Flaubert does not introduce any expectation of temptations in Antoine; each time, he is under the illusion of having triumphed – a true resolution in his mind that results in a series of oscillations. In contrast, the reader's previous knowledge means they are aware that the temptations will form a series and realizes that the end of any particular temptation may be a false resolution; thus, the graph of the exterior curve

displays a step-wise increase rather than an oscillation. These repeating patterns carry a secondary meaning as well; the curves show (respectively) Antoine's wanderings between dogma ( $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ ) and sanity ( $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ), and the growing conviction of his irrationality that the audience experiences with every new example of Antoine's temptations.

The micro-structural pattern changes, however, and the interior and exterior curves return to congruency when we reach the peak of the curve: the double climax (C and D). This double peak consists of a false climax followed by a true climax; the false climax is Antoine's encounter with the Devil (Chapter VI – VIIA) and the procession of monsters and evolution (Chapter VIIB – C). Since the Devil is the ultimate origin of temptations to sin in both Christian doctrine (which guides Antoine's expectations) and typical hagiography (which guides the reader's expectations), any encounter with Satan would appear to mark an ultimate crisis of faith. The Devil appears to Antoine in both his own guise and that of his "*double aspect*" (Death and Lust); in this, one could see a trinity that makes this particular temptation even more crushing theologically. On the level of the association of faith and reality, the Devil again seems to inflict the greatest temptation to invert the  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  pattern and the return to sanity. In his own form, he shows Antoine the universe as it is and introduces him to the wonders of physics; he does not merely question Antoine's beliefs, but demonstrates their error. In the form of the female avatars of Death and Lust, he lures Antoine with the essence of surrender to other all-encompassing philosophies – to cynicism or hedonism, both of which present a certain inevitability. Given the seemingly culminating magnitude of these challenges, Antoine's

“defeat” of them should be, or at least introduce, the resolution of the narrative – which it initially seems to do (C). This is not, however, the case. Though Antoine has “triumphed,” declaring (of Death and Luxury) “Aucun des deux ne m’épouvante. Je repousse le Bonheur, et je me sens éternel.” (224 224B), he is not finished yet. Antoine himself’s musings provide the trigger that sets off the true crisis: “Il doit y avoir, quelque part, des figures primordiales, dont les corps ne sont que les images. Si on pouvait les voir on connaîtrait le lien de la matière et de la pensée, en quoi l’Être consiste !” (224). Obviously, some part of Flaubert’s Antoine is unsatisfied with Church doctrine and its lack of true knowledge. Antoine’s own speculative question triggers an increase in the reader’s anticipation – will Antoine’s question be answered? Is this another temptation or a change of heart? Thus, we arrive at the last “temptation” of sanity, the true crisis. This last temptation is the lure of an answer to Antoine’s query in the form of biological science; science is, ultimately, incompatible with Antoine’s religious doctrine.

Antoine does not necessarily see the incompatibility at this point; rather, his musings explore the nature of this temptation. After wondering about the nature of matter and thought, he suggests to himself that mysterious mythological creatures have appeared before in history (e.g., Babylon) and even to him in the clouds; he adds that “Ceux qui traversent le desert rencontrent des animaux dépassant toute conception...” (225 4B). In fact, this is how his vision of biological beings begins, with mythical creatures of the desert – the Sphinx and the Chimaera.<sup>17</sup> One of the notable aspects of the parade of

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<sup>17</sup> I will not here go into the discussion of the allegorical meanings of these two creatures specifically, but it is even so important to acknowledge the fact that they are, indeed, allegorical figures (for “Science” and “Fantasy”); see Vade’s 1977 *Romantisme* article(s) “Le Sphinx et la Chimère” and “Le Sphinx et la Chimère II.”

monsters is their arguing with one another with no apparent reaction from the protagonist; in the stream of imaginary creatures that follows (up through the Unicorn), Antoine comments only a single time, and that only when one of the creatures (the Catoblepas) directly addresses him. Even then, the audience observes Antoine once again toying with the idea of death (232). When Flaubert moves from mythical beasts to evolving life (starting with the Beasts of the Sea), Antoine remains a mute spectator. It is, however, the procession of primitive life-forms that forms the essence of the true *crise*. To make certain that the audience appreciates that this is having a profound effect on Antoine, Flaubert describes his reaction “Et il n’a plus peur! ... et retenant son haleine, il regarde” (236). While observing the ancient shells and plants, or at least traces of them, Antoine loses his fear of those things beyond the bounds of doctrine. He becomes enraptured by a demonstration of the scientific model of evolution and the discipline of paleontology. Following this, Antoine’s observations continue with primitive insect life and, finally, microscopic organisms. In appreciating and entering into the lowest levels of life and their past echoes, Antoine is once more straying from the path of higher reality toward (if not precisely to) the world of empirical reality and doubt. The vision of micro-organisms corresponds, then, to the highest point of narrative tension (D) as well as functioning as an answer to Antoine’s questions about the nature of life. Antoine’s response to this *crise* is unlike his responses to previous “temptations;” he does not wonder aloud uneasily, as he had after the visions of the heresiarchs, nor does he loudly deny being intrigued, as he had after seeing the Devil. Instead, Antoine displays a burst of manic enthusiasm over a new understanding: “Ô bonheur! bonheur! j’ai vu naître la vie, j’ai vu le mouvement commencer” (237). His rapturous monologue is a declaration



of desire to unite with the physical world. He not only wants to experience existence (if briefly) as a variety of different animals, plants, and as something unspecified that reproduces via mitosis, he even appears to accept – and want to be part of – the types of physical phenomena that the Devil had alluded to, and even some that Satan had left out. Antoine expresses a longing to “vibrer comme le son, briller comme la lumière, ... pénétrer chaque atome” (237). He is, by this point, fully caught in the lure of physics, subjects even more abstract than micro-biology: theories of sound, light, and the study of molecules themselves. The saint, in what looks to the reader like a fit of scientific epiphany, declares that he desires (more than anything) to “descender jusqu’au fond de la matière, être la matière!” (237). Antoine has gone beyond doctrine and distanced himself to some extent from “higher truth;” his desire now is not to elevate himself to spiritual perfection, but rather to descend into the heart of the material world.

If this episode with beasts and biology has, indeed, been as true a theological temptation as it would seem to be, it is one that Antoine has succumbed to. In 1871 Flaubert himself informed Edmond de Goncourt that this was the case: “il [Flaubert] me confie que la défaite finale du saint est due à la *cellule*; la cellule scientifique” (Goncourt 352, 317 octobre 1871). The connection between Flaubert’s statement and Antoine’s fascinated exploration of the microscopic world (D) is self-evident. Flaubert explicitly states to Goncourt that Antoine does not conquer scientific temptation and, indeed, suffers defeat at its hands; his explication the ultimate failure of “higher truth” in comparison to “empirical reality” at this particular crisis point. From an external perspective, Antoine has parted company with dogma and absorbed a scientific lesson. This is a surprise to the audience: Antoine has previously declined to accept evidence of

empirical reality, particularly when this skepticism undermines (so to speak) the idea of faith's "higher truth" as the only truth empirical reality as a figment of the imagination. Thus, the audience is caught in a state of heightened tension. This is particularly true given the complicating factor of tone; Antoine still sounds unstable – Flaubert describes him as "délirant" – but the saint shows implacable certainty as well, and complete certainty has a close association with madness. From Antoine's interior point of view, of course, the level of narrative tension (though not necessarily the level of excitement) is significantly lower; he does not know – and would not believe – that he has failed. He is in no suspense, because he feels that he has won.

This brings us finally to the last paragraph and the "resolution." This paragraph contains no dialogue from Antoine, just Flaubert's descriptive prose regarding the setting and the saint's final actions (in the "stage directions)." In the course of this final paragraph the reader gradually becomes aware that Antoine's "defeat," at the hands of science and the material world, while real, is not actually the end of his transformation. In fact, over the course of the paragraph Antoine slides back to his previous doctrinal state of mind without even being aware of the change. Flaubert's description of the final setting begins the portrayal of Antoine's relapse, delineating an intermediate state in which the protagonist moves from a devotion to nature itself into a conflation of nature and religion. Flaubert's final descriptive "stage directions" regarding the setting vividly conveys the extent of the conflation. Nature appears in shining religious imagery: "comme les rideaux d'un tabernacle qu'on relève, des nuages d'or en s'enroulant à large voûtes découvrent le ciel" (Flaubert 237). Typically, in Catholic tradition the separation of the curtains shielding the tabernacle reveals the space within which lies the Blessed

Sacrament. In this case, it the clouds correspond to these concealing draperies while the sky itself is the tabernacle; within this holy space lies the sun, a central element of the natural world worthy of reverence. At the same time, for Antoine the sun serves as a center of religious veneration when he sees the face of Jesus in the center of the solar disk: “Tout au milieu, et dans le disque même du soleil, rayonne la face de Jésus-Christ” (*ibid*).

Flaubert’s description of Antoine’s final actions complete his reversion to a purely religious state of mind: he “fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières.”<sup>18</sup> These actions are those proper for a saint in such circumstances and conform utterly to religious tradition. Antoine’s is still certain of his triumph despite his unacknowledged shift back to his original state. Flaubert’s use of the verb “se remettre” in “se remet en prières” rather than simply “se mettre” is vital. Antoine has not just decided that his vision merits a prayer; but he is explicitly returning to a previous pattern, namely his customary attempts to bolster his faith (and thus reject temptations) via supplication to God. In fact, at the beginning of the novel, Antoine states that “before” (i.e. before the narrative takes place) praying was an important part of his everyday life. At the end, he returns to a behavior that was already lacking change and thus discards any kind of evolution despite what should have been dramatic changes in the scope of his knowledge and self-awareness. The saint’s willful blindness in this context is a sign for the audience that he has not truly achieved a modification of his previous dogmatic convictions. He still (or

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<sup>18</sup> The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines “prayer” thus: “in a broad sense [prayer] is “raising the mind to God...In its broadest sense prayer is “speaking with God” Healy, K. J. “Prayer (Theology of).” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. edition, vol. 11, Gale, 2003, pp. 593-601. Gale Virtual Reference Library, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3407709047/GVRL?u=euge94201&sid=GVRL&xid=0bd5296b..> Similarly, the Littré defines the French word “prière” as “Acte de religion par lequel on s’adresse à Dieu” Littré, Émile. “prière”. *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, vol. 3, L. Hachette, 1874..

once again) ignores the possibility that  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  is not only fundamentally wrong, but dangerous as well. his “defeat” by science is neither a path to sanity nor a rejection of the dogmatic “truth” of faith. He voluntarily plunges into delusion, unwilling or unable to confront the uncertainty inherent in rational thought and instead finding simple answers in the authoritative voice of Christian doctrine.

Though Catholic dogma still played a major role in the controversies of the Third Republic, the late-nineteenth century saw the addition of a new variety of faith, a novel category of paths to certainty: belief in the essential truth of the paranormal. For those who distrusted or disdained religion, faith in the verity of supernatural phenomena provided a modern, “scientific” way of rationalizing mysterious or incomprehensible occurrences. The ability to couch an essentially mystical set of beliefs in scientific terminology allowed believers to claim a modern, theoretically rationalistic character for their approach, one superficially removed from more traditional religious certainty. It was relatively easy to disguise, even from oneself, the intrinsic opposition between true science and faith in paranormal phenomena; this is particularly true because of the heterogeneous definitions of the latter. As Sophie Lachapelle puts it

there was no consensus as to what counted as a supernatural or a natural occurrence and what did not, but supernatural phenomena were generally understood to be events or experiences that apparently transcended the laws of nature (Lachapelle 4)

Among other loosely connected “supernatural” phenomena were spiritism (known in the U.S. as “spiritualism”); occultism; mesmerism/hypnotism; and belief in extraterrestrial life (Bensaude-Vincent and Blondel 31-32; Flammarion V). In his short story “Le

Horla,” Guy de Maupassant’s crafts a vivid portrayal of how the such beliefs can function as a source of certainty in the face of erratic and growing insanity; it is the tale of a contemporary man who finds an all-encompassing explanation for his increasing delusions in a combination of various paranormal theories which, in fact, do not bring him comfort, but rather lead him deeper into madness.

#### OBSSESSION WITH THE INVISIBLE - “LE HORLA”

“Le Horla” provides a particularly vivid example of the search for certainty in the falsely rational and the ultimately unprovable and its own vicious associations with a “greater” reality, very similar to Antoine’s quest for certainty in Catholic doctrine. “Le Horla” mirrors *La Tentation* beyond their larger themes of uncertainty and madness; Maupassant’s nameless narrator is his protagonist – inherently unreliable in the interpretations of facts and events that Maupassant attributes to him. Though the protagonist/narrator is not as ostentatiously vacillating as Antoine, he ultimately equally reluctant to confront unpleasant uncertainty and is just as prone to self-destructive doctrinaire interpretations of what he experiences. We can examine this narrator and these concepts in “Le Horla” by the same analysis of theme and structure, for both internal and external perceptions, as with Flaubert. The philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  is applicable to “Le Horla” as it was for *La Tentation*.

Maupassant, like Flaubert, weaves his themes through cycles of madness – patterns characterizing the dynamic, unstable equilibrium  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}} \rightleftharpoons \frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ .

Whereas Antoine began *La Tentation* in a base state (albeit a confused one) of

$\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ , Maupassant’s narrator shows an overall broad evolution from a seeming

initial state of  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  to an emphatic one of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  in his final lunacy; the audience sees inversions and fits of sanity within this larger pattern, notable moments of lucidity or, conversely, delusion. In the case “Le Horla,” an appropriate term for the protagonist’s mental agitation (Littré “manie” 422).

Given the secular nature of “Le Horla”’s setting and protagonist, Maupassant’s preferred element of repetition is not a religious temptation; instead, he uses episodes or, more precisely, attacks. This latter term is particularly apt because it carries different connotations for the internal and external points of view. For the protagonist, the attacks are literal – episodes of violence directed at the narrator by an unseen enemy; for an outside audience, the attacks are metaphorical – episodes of madness, perhaps even brainstorms. Maupassant’s use of a diary as the form to vehicle his narrative reinforces this ordering of incidents, though the episodes do not always confine themselves to single entries; they can include several, or parts of one or more. In this work, it is the narrator who defines the extent of the thematic pattern element since in the various diary entries he explicitly records when each specific attack begins and ends. As in *La Tentation*, the “attacks” in “Le Horla” function on a double sensory and intellectual level. At their most basic level, the episodes are periods of altered perceptions on the part of the narrator and portray his various hallucinations and *idées fixes*; more subtly, each is an opportunity for the protagonist. He can either realize that what his senses tell him is not necessarily true and that there may be no single answer for his condition ( $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ), or he can refuse to acknowledge the inherent uncertainty of his state and cling to his search for a pseudo-scientific universal solution ( $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ ).

In “Le Horla,” the episodes do not follow a template; instead, the “attacks” have general characteristics:

- An introductory statement by the narrator that sets up the context of the episode
- A description of the experience itself
- The narrator’s meditations on the incident(s) or plans in reaction to them

Of particular interest is a consistent quality that encompasses all the attacks: these episodes display a progression from general to particular with specific variations connected to the interior and exterior perceptions of “attacks” mentioned above. For the narrator, his aggressor becomes more personified and personalized (from an anonymous, formless manipulator to a cruel creature with a name) and more precise in his methods of attack (from mysterious movement of objects to inserting thoughts into the protagonist’s head). This (generally) accompanies the narrator’s progression toward  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ .

From the reader’s point of view, as the attacks accumulate, the symptomology of the narrator’s condition becomes more detailed and his insanity bears an even greater resemblance to specific mental illnesses, conditions of which the public had some knowledge through popularization by such scientists as Jean-Martin Charcot of the Salpêtrière. The approximate progression of the attacks is outlined in Table 2. These episodes chronicle the narrator’s descent into madness. Such a narrative is incoherent by definition – possibly meaningless – unless the author begins his tale with a description of his protagonist’s *milieu* and background, creating a mental departure point for the character.

Table 2: Individual “attacks” in “Le Horla”

<i>Attack #</i> [mine]	<i>Diary entry dates</i>	<i>Phenomena / symptoms</i>
1	16 mai, 18 mai, 25 mai, 2 juin, 3 juin	Physical malaise, emotional instability, night terrors
2	Each day of 2 juillet – 5 juillet, 10 juillet	Insomnia & Night Hag/quasi-succubus, seemingly impossible movement of material objects [esp. food and drink]
3	16 juillet, 19 juillet	“Proof” of the power of hypnotic suggestion [foreshadowing of next episode]
4	Each day of 6 août – 16 août,	Appearance of narrator’s supernatural tormentor, mind control
5	17 août (latter part of), 18 août	The “Horla” makes itself at home, flees an attack from narrator
6	19 août (after ellipses), 19 août, 2 <sup>nd</sup> entry	Insertion of thoughts into his mind, manipulation of mirror reflections
7	10 septembre (1 <sup>st</sup> half)	Attempt to destroy the “Horla” by setting fire to his home
8	10 septembre (last quarter)	Decision to commit suicide

This element is even more vital because Maupassant creates his central character *ex nihilo*. Flaubert’s use of a historical figure allowed his audience to begin the narrative with a pre-established context, both physical and mental; Maupassant’s contrasting approach means that he must create a space at the beginning of the narrative that includes no “attack.” This small section, moreover, must coax the reader to identify with the narrator (at least to some extent).

The protagonist’s paean of praise to his home provides a number of oblique clues to his class, status, and tastes. He is from an old, landed family; his house is in the same



location “où sont nés et morts mes aïeux” (Maupassant 259-260). His estate is in the countryside of Normandy, but close to the traditional major city of the region, Rouen (enough to be able to hear its cathedral’s bells); he is a man who can move between the bucolic and urban *milieux*. Though the protagonist’s status indicates that he is an educated man, he has a slightly mystical streak. He meditates at length upon the mysterious influences that manipulate our emotions, and declares more generally “Comme il est profond, ce mystère de l’Invisible!” (261). This speculative reverie also gives hints about the models of reasoning and logic that shape the protagonist’s “rational” analysis of his experiences, as well as the philosophical assumptions lurking in the narrator’s habits of thought. His musing, for example, parallels such statements as that of Camille Flammarion (astronomer and aficionado of the paranormal) that “nous vivons au milieu d’un monde invisible pour nous et qu’il n’est pas impossible que des êtres (aussi invisibles pour nous) vivent également sur la terre.” (qtd. in Edelman 94). Flammarion’s concept of an invisible world co-existing with the mundane world and the corollary that there are invisible beings living amongst humans is a central tenant for the narrator’s view of the world and the basis for his eventual conviction that he has a supernatural persecutor.

The most vital element of the narrator’s ontological soliloquy is his affirmation of the insufficiency and inadequacy of human senses – “nos sens misérables” (Maupassant 261). Even Maupassant’s use of the capital letter “I” (“Invisible”) reinforces the guiding disjunction between human senses and the larger universe: the majuscule, in an occurrence such as this, can indicate a personification “par l’exaltation de la pensée” of an idea “qui ne touche point nos sens” (Bonneau et al. 99). The protagonist’s analysis of

these weaknesses is in fact precise and accurate; Maupassant here recapitulates part of Hippolyte Taine's theories in *De l'Intelligence*. In melding the narrator's scientific discussion of limits of human perception with his allusions to the Invisible and the unknowable, Maupassant simultaneously provides the audience with another point of identification with the narrator (have we all not noticed the failings of our senses?) and evidence of the protagonist's fascination with a certain type of explanation for physical and psychological phenomena – that which requires confidence in the unprovable. Thus, the reader becomes prepared for the narrator's dis-equilibrated intellectual responses to the various "attacks."

Overall, the anonymous narrator, like Antoine, is searching for certainty in the corrosive appeal of the irrational, but as in *La Tentation*, the protagonist of "Le Horla" has within each of his "episodes" mini-shifts in equilibrium, opportunities to employ skepticism, to re-evaluate his perception of the relationship between what is true and what is real. Thus, his philosophical equilibrium can fall to *manie* –  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  – or waver under the influence of evidence and logic, temporarily aligning with the audience in favor of the saner  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ .

The narrator's (growing) certainty is self-reinforcing; in using the diary form, Maupassant has allowed the reader no source of information but the narrator, and it is he who defines what is "evidence" and "proof." The protagonist does have moments of lucidity and critical thought when he questions his own sanity; a particularly intense self-examination occurs in the entry of 7 août:

Je me demande si je suis fou. En me promenant ..., des doutes me sont venus sur ma raison, non point des doutes vagues comme j'en avais jusqu'ici, mais des doutes précis, absolus." (Maupassant 280)

Maupassant's language suggests that the narrator's doubts of his own sanity stem in some way from flashes of empirical thought; the author characterizes the protagonist's current doubts as "précis, absolus" rather than the "vagues" ones he had had at an earlier and less severe stage of his mental derangement. These flashes of critical thought serve to underline the blind and self-justificatory nature of the narrator's usual logic in the majority of the narrative. Though Flaubert and Maupassant both create intermittent periods of clarity in their protagonists' thought processes, they do not actually portray the same process. As mentioned previously, Flaubert's protagonist from the beginning has an underlying approach of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ ; as he vacillates, the strength of his doubts changes, but they are part of a continuous cycle. The path of Maupassant's narrator is more clearly a progression. Because he is searching for an answer to a specific situation, he begins in a largely rational state and moves not simply toward (greater) madness as time elapses but also toward a more and more deformed process of "logical" reasoning. Unlike Antoine, Maupassant's narrator has no pre-determined detailed doctrine to conform to; he must create it himself. Though his appearance of "empiricism" might lead one to suppose that "science" is a source of dogma for him (it was then, and is now, a commonplace that science is another religion), true empiricism depends too much on accounting for all evidence – including the negative – and results that external sources verify. This protagonist's "reasoning" is an ersatz version of an empirical, rational scientific approach, one increasingly dependent on his own perceptions and thus on his

desire for certainty and his consequent refusal to separate his preconceptions from the idea of a “larger” reality. As I mentioned, the narrator’s initial response to his dilemma meshes with the rational process behind the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; it is as his search progresses that he develops a fixation on a single solution – persecution by a supernatural entity – that he must force all his experiences, all his “evidence” to confirm. Each of his experiences (and failures) provides a new link in his mind between his “faith” and his own “reality,” even as these attacks validate his previous deductions.

Setting aside for the moment the structural components of the narrative, we can divide the incidences of shifts between this skewed type of reasoning and the more logical consideration of empirical reality into roughly three sections or stages (Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of philosophical equilibrium in “Le Horla”

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Entry Dates</i>	<i>Characterization <sup>a</sup></i>	
1	2 mai à 3 juin	common-sense initial responses (w/ hints of magical thinking)	rational »» irrational
1 <sup>st</sup> Event	2 juillet	VIST TO MONT-ST-MICHEL, CONVERSATION W/MONK	
2	3 juillet à 14 juillet	vacillation between rational evaluation and self-deception	rational $\Leftrightarrow$ irrational
2 <sup>nd</sup> Event	16 juillet	HYPNOTISM SESSION W/DR. PARENT	
3	30 juillet à 10 septembre	full-blown irrationality and denial of responsibility	irrational

<sup>a</sup> “rational” corresponds to  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ , “irrational” corresponds to  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$

Between these are influential experiences for the protagonist, both of which take place “away,” outside the confines of the narrator’s estate and allow him some (theoretically) exterior insight from which however he takes only that which echoes his own point of view. As an example of the first stage of the narrator’s response, his first step (after the initial attack) is to see his physician; though this is an entirely sensible action, the narrator’s pre-medical speculation on his possible condition hints already at his character’s penchant for leaping to the most mysterious – and dramatic - explanation. To provide this hint, Maupassant places a significantly ambiguous descriptive phrase in his protagonist’s mouth. According to the narrator, the source of his physical/emotional distress (specifically, his accompanying premonitions of terrible danger) is “sans doute l’atteinte d’un *mal encore inconnu*, germant dans le sang et dans la chair.” (emphasis mine; 262). There are two possible ways to interpret the phrase “mal encore inconnu”: 1) no one knows what specific condition [mal] he is suffering from, or 2) whatever the condition is, it is one that is “unknown to science.” The first interpretation merely reinforces what the protagonist has already said, namely that at this point he suspects a physical cause; the second is much more intriguing. This one echoes the protagonist’s early musings on the importance of the Mysterious and the ultimate unknowability of the world around us – why would this phenomenon not be true of medicine as well? The second part of the sentence (“germant ... chair”) takes on more significance as well if one uses the “mysterious illness” interpretation. Given that “germer” indicates growth and proliferation, and that he places this proliferation in the medium of blood and tissue, what the narrator is referring to is probably some kind of micro-organism (by the 1880s quite well-known to the non-scientific public as an agent of disease); the principal

characteristic of micro-organisms is, of course, that they are so tiny as to be invisible to the naked eye. He is at the very least implying a specific characterization of a part of the “Invisible” that so occupies his reveries. The doctor discovers several physical symptoms, though these only truly provide evidence that the character is perturbed: “Il m’a trouvé le pouls rapide, l’œil dilaté, les nerfs vibrants, mais sans aucun symptôme alarmant.” (*ibid*). The doctor prescribes a relatively standard treatment: showers and a sedative (potassium bromide).<sup>19</sup> They don’t work, but that was not uncommon and depended on many factors. The narrator does not yet propound any supernatural theories, or any theories at all for that matter; at this point, he merely wonders about his condition, and tries such common-sense treatments as physical exercise and changes of scenery.

The first of the incidents that shifts the overall rational  $\rightleftharpoons$  irrational equilibrium is a vacation with religious overtones – to Mont St. Michel, formerly unknown to the protagonist – which re-introduces the Unseen to the narrative<sup>20</sup> via the discourse of a nameless monk who recounts legends and affirms the power of the Invisible. To a great extent the monk’s speeches echo the narrator’s earlier musings; it is these echoes that the narrator finds persuasive and that reaffirm the heretofore less obvious inverted approach to the Unknown versus confirmable reality ( $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ ). He himself expresses this reaffirmation in an explicit manner, referring to the monk’s trite assertion that the wind is

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<sup>19</sup> In 1875 the renowned psychologist Auguste Voisin had published an entire monograph called *De l’Emploi du bromure de potassium dans les maladies nerveuses*, in which he mentions numerous “états nerveux divers” that it had been used to treat, including insomnia, athsma, and melancholy Voisin, Auguste-Félix. *De l’Emploi du bromure de potassium dans les maladies nerveuses, par le Dr Auguste Voisin,... mémoire couronné par l’Académie de médecine (Prix Civrieux, 1871)*. G. Masson, 1875.. 1874 saw an equally comprehensive publication concerning showers and other hydrotherapeutic treatments: *Traité théorique et pratique d’hydrothérapie*. Maupassant himself had tried these methods.

<sup>20</sup>Bury points out that Maupassant had already used Mont Saint-Michel as a focus of the supernatural in a *Gil Blas* story from 1882 Maupassant, Guy de. *Le Horla*. edited by Philippe Bonnefis, A. Michel, 1984..

powerful yet invisible: “Je me tus devant ce simple raisonnement. Cet homme était un sage ou peut-être un sot. Je ne l’aurais pas pu affirmer au juste; mais je me tus. Ce qu’il disait là, je l’avais pensé souvent.” (267). While the narrator is not quite convinced that the monk is profound rather than a fool, he admits to his preoccupation with the idea that natural forces and supernatural forces are equivalent.

The audience sees the protagonist’s second-stage vacillation principally in the mixture of lucid psychological self-evaluation and illogical rationalization that runs throughout the entries of this admittedly brief transitional section. When the narrator confronts the mysterious disappearance of some of his bedside water one night, he can postulate unknowing (possibly mad) action on his own part or outside interference; in his indeterminate state, he wavers back and forth between the two, switching between “on” and “moi” as the authors of the disappearance: “On avait donc bu cette eau? Qui? Moi? moi, sans doute? Ce ne pouvait être que moi?” (268). The protagonist appears to conclude that it must have been he who drank the water, but the question marks suggest that he suspects that some other individual had done so. The protagonist assumes that if he is indeed the culprit, he must have drunk the water while sleepwalking; he eliminates this possibility via “experiments.” These tests, however, have no external verification or even reference; it is only through the narrator’s judgement that the audience knows what “evidence” there is or what it means. The “experiment” ends up, ironically, serving as yet another incitement to consider empirical reality illusory.

The second pivotal experience for the protagonist is with science (of a kind) rather than with religion: hypnosis. In the 1880s hypnotic suggestion was not only a common theme but a topic of zealous interest in the psychological community. Kim Hajek states

that in France “for about a decade, research on hypnotism proliferated in learned societies, scientific periodicals, and medical faculty teaching” (366)<sup>21</sup>. thus, the narrator’s preoccupation with the phenomenon should represent an illustration of rationality. Nevertheless, from near the beginning of the entry in question (16 juillet), Maupassant once again undercuts the superficially “scientific” character of his protagonist. Three aspects of the incident are particularly significant in this context. First, he encounters hypnosis not in a clinical setting but rather in – literally – a parlor entertainment at the home of his cousin. This context already detracts from the medical seriousness of the experience. Secondly, though the hypnotist (Dr. Parent, a specialist in nervous disorders) claims to despise supernatural beliefs, this savant obliquely hints at a view of hypnotism that carries a tint of the Mysterious: he mentions the “manifestations extraordinaires” from experiments in hypnosis and their “résultats prodigieux,” then declares, “Nous sommes ... sur le point de découvrir un des plus importants secrets de la nature” via the exploration of suggestion and hypnotism (Maupassant and Bury 271-272). Thus, the good doctor’s point of view reflects certain aspects of the protagonist’s own interests in the mysterious, and contributes to the narrator’s growing tendency to resolve his confusion by attributing his problems to supernatural or occult causes. While the narrator confesses confusion after the end of the hypnosis episode (“Je ne sais plus que penser,” 278) as he did after his trip to Mont St-Michel, there are differences between the two reactions. Their divergence is indicative of the narrator’s increased preference for the inverted pair  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  over the more rational  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . While the narrator had

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Hippolyte Bernheim’s 1884 *De la suggestion dans l’état hypnotique et dans l’état de veille*



displayed some dubiousness regarding the reliability of the monk, there is no similar characterization of “sage ou sot” for the doctor; on the contrary, after seeing the apparent results of hypnotic suggestion upon his cousin, the protagonist literally runs to Dr. Parent for an “answer,” and immediately accepts the physician’s claims of the mysterious, unknowable nature of the world inside of and around us:

... je courus chez le docteur. Il allait sortir; et il m’écouta en souriant.

Puis il dit: ‘Croyez-vous maintenant?’

-- Oui, il le faut bien.’ (277)

Parent’s rather smug question “Do you believe now?” specifically refers to the narrator’s possible belief in the amazing powers of hypnotism, but beneath this specific case it implies that the protagonist now believes – and should believe – in the mystical or supernatural world. Indeed, the narrator not only affirms his belief, but intensifies the statement; he does not simply answer “yes,” but fervently declares “it is quite necessary.” This snippet of conversation provides a particular insight into the character of the protagonist; the famous contemporary psychologist and neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot himself considered hypnotism “a tool for ‘moral vivisection’ of the soul” (Hillman 166) and Dr. Parent cut through the narrator’s surface rationality to expose the mystical proclivities beneath.

Despite this reinforcement of the protagonist’s preoccupation with inexplicable phenomena (at least those in his mind), he still has some ability to perceive the relationship between higher truth and empirical reality via the rational pair  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . He notes that a change of venue and association with a large number of other people calms his preoccupation with the occult. In a completely logical tone, the narrator points

out that “Décidément, tout dépend des lieux et des milieux. Croire au surnaturel dans l’île de la Grenouillère, serait le comble de la folie ... mais au sommet du mont Saint-Michel ? ... ” (Maupassant and Bury 278). As aficionados of horror fiction can attest, setting is indeed critical to the credibility of paranormal phenomena; hauntings of isolated, imposing historical sites are inherently more believable than poltergeists at a crowded, banal pastry shop. Even his use of the rational pair, however, is a limited one; belief in the supernatural may be ridiculous at a chic hot-spot for Parisians, but the narrator says nothing about how rational such a belief is in a country house near Rouen! For him, of course, belief in the supernatural centers around his estate; when he returns there, he is once more tangled in the shifting equilibrium of illusion and empiricism. This point is particularly important because after this incident, the narrator remains at his home, a *milieu* which appears to be well suited to belief in the supernatural. It is, in fact, this change of venue that signals the beginning of the last stage of the narrator’s descent into irrationality and insanity.

The narrator’s initial break from rationality occurs with rapidity; not enough to suggest a true discontinuity, but surprisingly dramatic nevertheless. On 30 juillet, “Tout va bien;” by 4 août, the protagonist is wrapped in uncertainty because of mysterious goings-on at night; only two days later, he ironically achieves certainty in his irrationality. He clearly confirms his current nearly complete reliance on the irrational pair  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ : his delusions are now proof of his sanity. The narrator vehemently insists that he is NOT mad, asserting “Cette fois, je ne suis pas fou” and “je ne puis plus douter...” (279). His “evidence” for this declaration revolves around his own senses, specifically that of sight; within just the first paragraph of the entry for 6 août, he repeats

the phrase “j’ai vu...!” five times, three of these in a row immediately following “Cette fois, je ne suis pas fou” (“j’ai vu... j’ai vu... j’ai vu...!”). Rather than considering the possibility that his senses could be playing him false and transmitting a hallucination rather than perfectly reflecting reality, the narrator considers his personal visions of the invisible utterly reliable.

It is the “evidence” of his senses that convinces the protagonist of his sanity, yet we, the audience remember the narrator's early contention that human senses are feeble and inadequate. The protagonist has become glaringly self-contradictory to the point that the pair  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  spawns a variant couple  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{mirage}}$  that one could consider perhaps even more unequal and thus more dissociative than the original.

This mirage occurs in the rose garden of the narrator’s estate and concerns a rosebush, a *géant des batailles*. The protagonist observes a rose that seems to become detached from its bush and hover in the air before him; the narrative voice again underlines the visual foundation of the experience as he introduces the incident with the words “je vis, je vis, distinctement, tout près de moi ...” (*ibid*). Ironically, though the protagonist, in his unstable state, immediately suggests the presence of an invisible actor manipulating the rose, the flower remains the grammatical subject of the sentences making up the description. The narrator again places determined emphasis on visual “proof;” however, he never clearly “sees” the entity, only the rose. His inner conflation of the movements of the physical rose and the imaginary mysterious being hides the fact that his is only inferring the latter from his observation of the former:

... je vis, je vis distinctement, près de moi, la tige d’une de ces roses *se plier*,  
COMME SI une main invisible l’eût tordue, puis *se casser* COMME SI cette main

l'eût cueillie! Puis la fleur *s'éleva*, suivant la courbe qu'AURAIT DECRITE un bras en la portant vers une bouche...(sic) (ibid)<sup>22</sup>

Maupassant uses pronominal verbs for all the movements of the rose, a usage which superon its face suggests that the rose itself has agency (the pronominal verbs in their reflexive sense) but subtly implies that that the narrator is observing the results of actions unseen (the pronominal verbs in their passive sense): the rose's stem bends itself (or is bent); it breaks (or is broken); it lifts itself up (or is lifted up). The "comme si" phrases indicate a hypothetical situation in which the invisible presence is the author of the rose's actions; Maupassant has his narrator positing an "invisible hand" and an "invisible arm."

This episode is bizarre enough that even the protagonist briefly becomes aware that he is reacting *irrationally*, and that this is indicative of a change in his mental state: "il n'est pas permis à un homme raisonnable et sérieux d'avoir de pareilles hallucinations." (280). Once again, Maupassant is playing with double meanings; when he has his narrator state that a "reasonable" man is not permitted to have such hallucinations, the audience can see two possible deductions. The fact that the narrator has "such" hallucinations means either that he is, indeed, irrational or conversely that what he sees are not truly hallucinations. The protagonist essentially chooses the second option; he cannot maintain the rational approach of  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ , but almost instantly reverses himself completely. In an example of the delusional certainty characteristic of *manie*<sup>23</sup>,

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<sup>22</sup> The emphasis is mine; the italics indicate pronominal verbs with the rose as the subject and the small caps indicate inferential phrases.

<sup>23</sup> Despine says of those in the grip of *la manie*: "Mille hallucinations achèvent souvent d'égarer son esprit; il voit ce qui n'existe pas; il converse avec des interlocuteurs invisibles; il les appelle de leurs noms, les apostrophe, les interroge ou leur répond, leur commande ou leur obéit; d'autres fois il discute avec eux, s'irrite de leur opposition ou de leurs exigences, les injurie ou en est injurié, menacé, domine." Despine, Prosper. *De la folie au point de vue philosophique, ou plus spécialement psychologique, étudiée chez le malade et chez l'homme en santé*. Savy, 1875.

and the utter suppression of empiricism in favor of mystical “truth,” he insists “je suis certain, maintenant, certain comme de l’alternance des jours et des nuits, qu’il existe près de moi un être invisible, qui se nourrit de lait et d’eau, qui peut toucher aux choses...doué pas conséquent d’une nature matérielle, bien qu’imperceptible à nos sens ” (280). The narrator synthesizes his various hallucinatory experiences into a self-justifying hypothesis of an supernatural entity who drinks milk and water (see entry for 10 juillet) and can manipulate tangible objects (see entry for 6 août) despite being invisible to human senses. The protagonist has entered a vicious circle wherein his certainty becomes proof of his sanity, and his illusion of sanity provides the basis for his certainty; his statement that he knows he is *not* insane – “un halluciné raisonnant”– is precisely because he has analyzed his own state of mind and determined it to be sane. He would consider the possibility of *manie* only “si je ne connaissais parfaitement mon état, si je ne le sondais en l’analysant avec une complète lucidité” (280). From this point forward, the narrator remains locked in the approach of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ ; he is now incapable of re-evaluating his previous conclusions. He must transform or force all he perceives or discovers into evidence to support his “higher truth” in a parody of the empirical method. He transforms his hallucinations into ersatz empirical observations and conjures up syllogisms with false premises to justify his insistence that he is sane: since

The protagonist’s preoccupation with the supernatural in fact colors the rest of his conception of the world and reality; he raves in a manner that partly delirious and partly prophetic, partly occult and partly speculative, but all conforming to his current “higher truth.” He imagines the imaginary supernatural entity – the “Horla” – as a member of a conquering race, more advanced *because* they are supernatural, invisible, and capable of

things that seem to contradict current knowledge (287-288). As if to emphasize the connection between the protagonist's pseudo-scientific visions and more traditional religious mysticism, Maupassant has his character harken back to his experience on Mont Saint-Michel as an explanation for how such a creature could exist without his being able to perceive it: "Pourquoi? Oh! je me rappelle à présent les paroles du moine du mont Saint-Michel" (288). Once again, the narrator reinforces the centrality of the invisible and unknowable to his current (irrational) approach to reality.

For most of the rest of the story, iteration follows iteration of the protagonist's obsession with  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ . The final incident of the tale, however, demonstrates the culmination of this tendency, in which  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  goes to what is very nearly a limit in which empirical reality disappears entirely, leaving no truth but faith's "higher truth" and no "evidence" which is not confirmation of this latter. The last few entries portray the narrator's decision to kill his tormentor (the invisible Horla) and the plan he makes and carries out – to burn down his own house. How can one burn to death an immaterial entity who only indicates its existence by displaced objects and mental influence, particularly an entity who is immune to other physical methods of murder? The narrator's convoluted "reasoning" leading him to banish other methods of murder is a twisted application of empiricism: "Le tuer, comment? puisque je ne peux pas l'atteindre? Le poison? mais il me verrait le mêler à l'eau et nos poisons, d'ailleurs, auraient-ils un effet sur son corps imperceptible ? Non... non... sans aucun doute..." (292). For the narrator, killing the Horla is problematic due to the creature's simultaneous perceptiveness and intangibility; it would see him adding poison to the

water (or milk, presumably) with which it sustains itself and, in addition, might not even be susceptible to poisons that would kill a man. The protagonist's spasms of near-reason make his constant return to  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  and delusion all the more striking, particularly given the speed of the inversions. Within the entry for a single date (10 septembre), the narrator swings between certainty and doubt about the status of the Horla. The protagonist's underlying insanity, however, reveals itself in the fact that both his certainty and doubt share the same irrational assumptions – namely, that the Horla exists, is personally hostile to him, and is in fact unknowable.

The protagonist brackets a swift stream of rhetorical questions with declarative statements. He begins by describing the (supposed) demise of the Horla in his burning house: "... je pensais qu'il était là, dans ce four, mort... !" (294); immediately, however, he reverses himself in a welter of queries in the imperfect, saying "Mort? Peut-être?... Son corps ? son corps que le jour traversait n'était-il pas indestructible par les moyens qui tuent les nôtres?". Faithful to his approach of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ , the narrator manages to turn his doubt into certainty by using an irrational application of syllogistic logic: the Horla is beyond humanity and the material; that which is intangible and further evolved is invulnerable; therefore, the Horla cannot be killed (though the protagonist implies that it might die of old age): "Après celui qui peut mourir tous les jours [humans], ... par tous les accidents, est venu celui qui ne doit mourir qu'à son jour [the Horla], ... parce qu'il a touché la limite de son existence!" (295). The narrator ends with statements of irrational, explicit certainty: "sans aucun doute ... [the Horla] n'est pas mort ..." (296) and, more emphatically, he applies this certainty to himself. He reveals in the last words the

ultimate self-destruction of *manie* as he adopts the trappings of empiricism while warping all of his conclusions to fit his irrational pre-existing approach to the world around him. He reaches the apogee of demented pseudo-syllogisms when he declares “Alors ... alors ... il va donc falloir que je me tue, moi! ...”. The “alors” plus “donc” plus “il faut que” follows a traditional apodictic pattern: the “thus” plus “therefore” indicates a conclusion and the “it is going to be necessary” does the same. Maupassant emphasizes this supposed syllogistic certainty both by using a *futur proche* (more certain than a *futur simple*) and by adding the disjunctive pronoun *moi* to a sentence that already contains the corresponding object pronoun *me*. The narrator’s final conclusion in this last sentence is irrational even by his own wildly idiosyncratic conceptual framework. For most of the narrative, the protagonist has asserted the independent existence of the Horla, yet the narrator’s decision to commit suicide presupposes the opposite – that the Horla’s existence depends completely on that of the protagonist. Thus, even solely in the context of theme, Maupassant emphatically demonstrates the irrational nature of the certainty associated with *manie*.

#### NARRATIVE DISEQUILIBRATION - “LE HORLA”

Maupassant’s message becomes even more forceful when one considers his manipulation of the tale’s narrative structure, as I have done with *La Tentation*. Baroni’s aforementioned definition of “la tension narrative” highlighting anticipation and uncertainty applies directly to the “internal” plot shape curve of “Le Horla”, in which the most significant indicator of “dramatic tension” is the narrator’s level of uncertainty. The peaks are those moments of his deepest confusion or vacillation, while the valleys are his moments of certainty or conviction. For Maupassant’s narrator, certainty is a function of



the changing equilibrium  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}} \rightleftharpoons \frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ , which ultimately moves

entirely to the latter. Because of the correlation in Maupassant's narrator between certainty and insanity, to examine how Maupassant manipulates the narrative structure to reveal his protagonist's madness, it is most beneficial to examine the valleys of the graph (moments of doubt/uncertainty) rather than the peaks (that is, those moments when he is most in the grip of "higher truth" and therefore most irrational).

When we plot the tension against the dates of the diary entries (Figure 2), we see a definite lack of regularity; some entries follow one right after another, but there can also be large gaps in time between them. For the reader, these clusters and silences are absent except insofar as we consider the dates in terms of the narrator's transformation. Because of the narrative's diary form, the peaks and valleys do not inevitably correspond to particular entry dates, as we can see in the fact that the climax and ending are part of a single entry. It is also important to notice that for "Le Horla," the external plot shape shows only a fraction of the step-wise character that we see in the external plot curve for *La Tentation*. Maupassant's narrative is such that the protagonist and reader have only increasingly brief moments of congruence in their levels of tension over the various plot points; even when the narrator is (briefly) assuaged, the reader remains aware that there is no real improvement in the protagonist's mental state. The onset of the narrator's mental instability is a moment of heightened tension for both, as is the first instance of (near) "certainty" on the part of the narrator during his visit to Mont-Saint-Michel; differences between the tension Maupassant attributes to his protagonist (internal curve) and the tension the reader experiences in reading the protagonist's narrative (external curve) internal are clear at later moments such as the Horla's first "physical" manifestation or

the protagonist's "realization" of the Horla's nature. The ending is the plot point at which the internal and external curves of tension finally return to congruence.

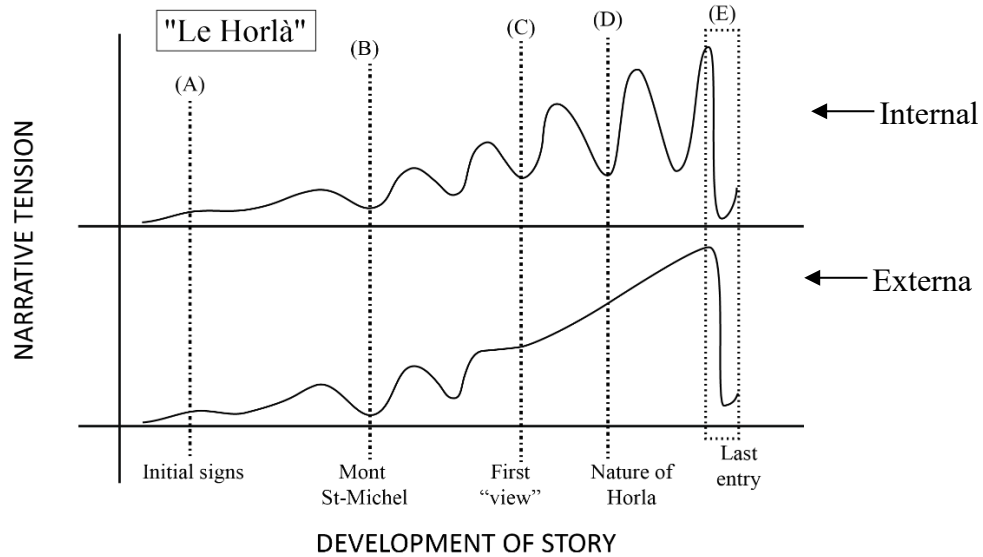


Figure 2: Interior [top] and exterior [bottom] plot shapes – "Le Horla"

I have already discussed the beginning and thus point A is slightly later in the story: the first serious manifestations of the narrator's illness (or condition). B is the first time that the protagonist feels that he has found an "answer," at Mont-St.-Michel. C is the protagonist's first "vision" of the Horla; D is the solidification of the narrator's theories about the nature of the creature; the section marked E is an expansion of the last entry (and its implications for what could follow).

At point A (the entry for May 16), the narrator has decided that his problems are physical in nature as well as psychological, and begins to slide into a state of paranoia:

J'ai la fièvre, une fièvre atroce, ou plutôt un énervement fiévreux, qui rend mon aussi souffrant que mon corps. J'ai sans cesse cette sensation d'un danger menaçant (261)

This increase in severity induces, unsurprisingly, the first peak of narrative tension in the interior plot curve. It is at this point that his tension and uncertainty first become acute (albeit much less than they will be later on). The audience feels a parallel surge of uneasiness; no matter what one's opinion of the protagonist at this point, it is impossible not to be affected by the narrator's affliction and recognize that its cause is elusive.

As noted earlier, July 2 is vital to theme as an influential event; it is as well an important point in the structure of the plot as the first instance of the protagonist experiencing relief via certainty, and thus the first drop in dramatic tension – in other words, the comfort of the superiority of faith's "higher truth" over empirical reality decreases the protagonist's perturbation. It is this certainty that allows him to declare, "Je rentre. Je suis guéri" (265). For the narrator, this conviction corresponds to an immediate drop in tension. At this point, the external curve continues to mirror the internal curve, though the causation is different. For the reader, the atmosphere of Mont-Saint-Michel and the explanations of the priest are much less important than the fact that the narrator claims to be cured; as of yet, the audience has little evidence to contradict the protagonist's judgment (other than his continuing preoccupation with the Invisible).

The internal and external levels of narrative tension continue to follow similar paths for a while longer, but have definitely stopped doing so by the entry of August 6<sup>th</sup>. This divergence between interior and exterior plot shapes directly reflects the thematic

changes in the equilibrium  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}} \rightleftharpoons \frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  at this point. For the

narrator, the feeling of certainty that  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  provides allows the interior narrative

tension to drop, while the audience's recognition of the irrational and insane nature of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  keeps the dramatic tension mounting in the exterior plot shape.

This new pattern in the narrative tension of interior oscillation matched against exterior continuing growth persists to the climax, most dramatically in the longest entry of the narrative, that of August 19. This entry (or, more accurately, the first of two entries with that date) is the epitome of pseudo-scientific certainty and contains startling examples of paradoxical, self-contradictory thought on the part of the protagonist, thought that reinforces the disparity between the internal and external levels of dramatic tension. Specifically, the narrator comes to "know" the name, origin and nature of his mysterious invisible persecutor. The first words of the entry declare "Je sais... je sais... je sais tout!" (286); in fact, several paragraphs later the narrator reiterates this, saying "À présent, je sais, je devine" (287). But what specifics does he now "know," and how does he know them? He learns the name "le Horla" from hearing the creature itself speak, and the rest he deduces from an article about an epidemic of possession in Brazil. To him, then, the logic which to the reader is a sign of deepening irrationality is to the protagonist at this moment a triumphant conviction based in  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$ .

The second entry for 19 August generates another increase in narrative tension for the protagonist, but not because of any doubts about the identity of his persecutor; rather, his disturbed state results from another incident with the Horla that in the following several entries leads the narrator into the aforementioned frantic speculation about how it might be possible to kill this immaterial creature. As has been true all along, it is

uncertainty that lies at the root of internal tension; any uncertainty about any aspect of his experiences becomes a peak in the graph of narrative tension.

Point D, the last entry (10 September) is easily as complex in its variations of interior narrative tension as that of 19 August; in fact, it is even more so. Because of this complexity, I have indicated this entry by a box rather than a line. The complexity of the variations in narrative tension in this entry lies in the rapid and dramatic inversion between certainty and desperate confusion on the part of the narrator though his mindset of  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{higher truth}}$  remains constant throughout. The 10 septembre entry includes a complete cycle of valley – peak – valley. As the final account commences, the audience finds that at some point between the previous uncertain entry (21 August) and this September date the protagonist had determined on a method of killing the Horla and experiences a near-transcendent confidence as he puts the plan into effect. He raves (after locking the Horla into a room) “J’étais sûr qu’il n’avait pu s’échapper et je l’enfermai, tout seul, tout seul ! Quelle joie! Je le tenais!” (293). It is interesting to note that Maupassant’s grammar reflects the inversions in the progression narrative tension in the entry. The narrator is describing his actions and thoughts during the previous day, hence there is a general past context. The first two verbs are, indeed, in past tenses: “étais” is in the imperfect (“was”) and “n’avait pu” is even further removed from the present in the pluperfect (“had not been able to”). The next verb, however, is in the simple future: “enfermerai” (“will confine”). We would expect the verb “enfermer” to be either in the imperfect (“enfermait”) if it were conveying the then-present state of affairs (“was confining”) or in the conditional (“enfermerait”) if it were conveying the narrator’s intent (“would confine”). Maupassant’s use of a simple future tense in a past context

introduces a degree of uncertainty and temporal ambiguity, particularly since he returns to the imperfect with the next verb, “tenais” (“had,” in the sense of a capture). There are other instances of such temporal reversals in this entry, strengthening the protagonist’s instability. Though the grammar plays with time rather than certainty, the dramatic switches still suggest *manie*. The narrator’s irrational conclusions about the Horla’s fate (and his own) reinforce this feeling of instability and contribute to the reader’s final level of dramatic tension – a heightening rather than the internal drop in tension. Though there was a disparity in the levels of internal and external narrative tension in *La Tentation*, in “Le Horla” the internal and external levels are diametrically opposite, increasing the reader’s conviction that the narrator is a *maniaque*.

#### CERTAINTY AND ILLUSION - *LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE* AND “LE HORLA”

The characterization of the protagonist in each of these books is that of a madman clinging to illusory certainty, vacillating between delusion and doubt. Their need for the security of syllogistic logic, even if it consists of fantasy, is clear in both the inversions of their perceptions of appearance vs. reality and in the fluctuating instability of the narrative tension the authors craft for the protagonist (interior) and audience (exterior).

Saint Antoine and Maupassant’s narrator epitomize the *manie* of rigid faith and in the end unwillingness to alter their conception of reality when faced with empirical evidence. but there are other varieties of insane certainty as well. Though the authors of these two works deliberately construct scenarios of authority-based faith, there are types of authority beyond supernatural or religious models – that is, a form of external certainty – that authors can incorporate into their narratives. In the hands of an author, such alternative arguments from authority can become an impetus to move their protagonists,

or even subsidiary characters, toward fallacious certainty. Self-generated authority is, in fact, an equally valid element for authors to integrate into the psychological states they create for their characters. One form of internal certainty leading insanity is megalomania, i.e. pathological narcissism; megalomania is yet another type of madness that was fascinating to the *fin de siècle* public and the subject of numerous psychological studies and theories at the time. As a general rule, late-nineteenth century French psychologists associated “*la monomanie*” with criminality, feeling that any individual whose egotism placed their own desires above all other considerations could not have anything more than an atrophied sense of morality.

Two authors who vividly presented this *monomanie* were the Isidore Ducasse (under the pen name “Le Comte de Lautréamont”) and Paul Villiers-de-l’Isle-Adam. Contemporaries of Flaubert and Maupassant, these two writers created *monomane* protagonists and thereby warned in their narratives to avoid placing one’s confidence in this criminal certainty. Ducasse and Villiers, like Flaubert and Maupassant, made use of both thematic and structural manipulation to reveal the madness behind absolute conviction. Their novels limn narcissistic characters amoral to the point of criminality, and form an intriguing counterpoint to the concept of the certainty of faith as a cause of, and element of, insanity.

### CHAPTER III

#### MASTERS OF REALITY: MEGALOMANIA AND THE CERTAINTY OF “GENIUS” - *LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR* AND *L'ÈVE FUTURE*

This chapter examines two works whose authors created protagonists with certain characteristics of pathological criminal behavior, Isidore Ducasse's *Les Chants de Maldoror* and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*. I shall first define the late nineteenth-century French psychological classification that best corresponds to such pathologies – *monomanie* – as well as its various manifestations. Following this, I will use this definition and its variations to illuminate how these two authors incorporate elements of these pathologies into the actions and statements they attribute to their principal characters. Finally, I shall discuss how the Ducasse and Villiers portray their protagonists as obsessed with their own self-generated interpretations of empirical reality.

Seeming certainty as a function of a pathological conception of reality is a phenomenon with numerous permutations. Among the various types of madness that late-nineteenth century French psychologists identified and codified were theories of criminal behavior tied to insanity. A prominent model of insanity with criminal variations was *monomanie*. A popular reference work from the 1860s (*Le Dictionnaire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts*) gives a clear exposition of the condition of *monomanie*. It describes the state generally as “folie ou délire portant sur un seul objet ... l'effet d'un désordre des passions ou des affections;” in which “La perversion des penchants, des affections, des sentiments naturels du *monomane* finit par entraîner le désordre de l'intelligence. (Bouillet 1071).” In this model, obsession combined with an emotional imbalance and a distortion of an individual's moral sense characterizes a *monomane* and can lead ultimately to overall deterioration of mental faculties.



*Monomanes* could fixate on anything; as the same dictionary notes, “L’objet de la monomanie peut varier à l’infini (*ibid*).” The sub-categories of *monomanie* include a number which had connections to violence or criminality, and they could overlap. Several are of particular importance for my purposes. In *monomanie ambitieuse/d’orgueil*, “le malade éprouve un besoin insatiable d’honneurs, de titres, de puissance ... il s’imagine général victorieux, roi, prophète, ou même Dieu;” he is avid for recognition as a unique and superior individual. In *monomanie furieuse*, the sufferer “entre en fureur contre ses ennemis imaginaires; il brise, déchire tout ce qui l’entoure;” he feels persecuted and responds with violence and destruction. *Monomanie Narcisse* is related to both of these; the patient “s’aime et s’admire” just as did the classical Narcissus. The most specifically tied to criminality is *monomanie homicide*, in which “l’malade est entraîné par un instinct aveugle qui le pousse à tuer;” he is, essentially, a conscienceless killer (*ibid*). As is evident from the preceding classifications, *monomanes* lived in their own personal realities (frequently tied to delusion and hallucinations) that warped events and interactions to fit the context of their personal narratives. Thus, such individuals were by definition certain of the absolute truth of their conception of reality and their role in the universe. In essence, sufferers of *monomanie* existed in a world of self-generated reality only partly connected to the empirical reality that others perceived. Two works from this period that stage the phenomenon of criminal *monomanie* are *Les chants de Maldoror* by Isidore Ducasse, a.k.a. Le Comte de Lautréamont, and *L’Ève future* by Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam. Ducasse and Villiers created their protagonists with mixtures of characteristics of the aforementioned types of *monomanie*; these protagonists represent individuals with no need to search for certainty; they are foci

of self-created universes, and generate certainty in others. Ducasse's protagonist Maldoror and Villiers' protagonist Thomas Edison are very different from Saint Antoine and the narrator of *Le Horla*. As centers of their own reality (and thus geniuses) these two new protagonists create their own dogma; they are near-godlike, at least in their own eyes. The authors draw Maldoror and Edison as bound up in their personal universes, universes with a dubious and shifting correspondence to empirical reality. Ducasse and Villiers craft personal realities for their protagonists that are surreal<sup>24</sup> manifestations of the universe that incorporate characteristics of *monomaneal* self-generated reality.

We can analyze the fraught relationships of self-proclaimed genius, insanity, and criminality via “couples philosophiques.” As the most basic representation of the contrast between the self-generated universe of a criminal *monomane* and the more general reality of a hypothetical reader the simple pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  is eminently suitable. Though this pair is strongly parallel to the  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  of Flaubert and Maupassant, there is a fundamental difference between the “higher truth” of faith – more specifically of a recognized doctrine, shared by many – and a reality that is an internally bound creation of a single mind. Thus, we must analyze the  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  relationship not merely separate from the previous  $\frac{\text{higher truth}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  relationship, a contrasting variation of the general pair  $\frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . This is all the more true since, as mentioned above, the “empirical reality” of *La Tentation* and *Le Horla* is empirical in the

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<sup>24</sup> “Surreal” in its generic sense rather than a reference to the Surrealist movement.

sense of “experience-based,”<sup>25</sup> but that of *Maldoror* and *L’Ève future* is empirical in the sense of “experimental science.”<sup>26</sup> Even so, common experience still plays a role in the works of Ducasse and Villiers. On the surface, readers can note a generalized abnormality in these authors’ protagonists, perhaps even see some hints of *folie de grandeur*. To further probe how *monomanie* of the aforementioned types gives rise to criminal certainty, the authors provide what is a kind of fictional case study of the *monomane* criminal. It is not necessary for readers to become an expert in criminal psychology; they need merely to be able to see the sharp contrast between “self-generated reality” and “empirical reality.” This is the contrast between what the patient sees and that which the psychologist knows. What the reader sees is a warped universe overlying a criminal mind with a mixture of the traits that exemplify *monomanie ambitieuse*, *monomanie furieuse*, *monomanie Narcisse*, and *monomanie homicide*.

In regard to *Les Chants de Maldoror*, I will start with begin with a review of the critical literature on the work, surveying previous approaches to analysis of this work and explaining how my approach departs from previous interpretations. I continue with an explication of the difficulties of form and point of view in *Maldoror*, and then turn to the critical application of the concept of philosophical pair. I shall specifically explore the way in which we can use these pairs to express a particular incongruity that Ducasse includes in the character of Maldoror: that between the universe as the protagonist imagines it and empirical reality. I shall in addition use contemporary psychological

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<sup>25</sup> “Guided by or derived from previous experience or unsystematic observation” Dictionary, Oxford English. “*empirical*, *adj. and n.*”. Oxford University Press, *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> “That pursues knowledge by means of direct observation, investigation, or experiment” (*ibid*, Def. 3)

models analyze this incongruity and the qualities of *monomanie* as the author incorporated them into the figure of Maldoror.

#### *LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR* – CRITICAL BACKGROUND

In the decades between the 1870s and the present, literary criticism on the *Chants de Maldoror* by Isidore Ducasse (a.k.a. the Comte de Lautréamont) has waxed and waned. For the neophyte, there are several critical editions of *Maldoror* (the book) as well as meta-criticism on it. Chief among the critical editions are Jean-Luc Steinmetz's of *Maldoror* (1990) and complete works (2009). There are other good critical editions with extensive dossiers as well, for example the Goldenstein edition of the *Chants* (1992). Meta-critical overviews and bibliographies of Ducasse's<sup>27</sup> work range from older texts such as Frans de Haes' detailed *Images de Lautréamont* (1970), which classifies criticism by both time period and critical school, to R. Lack's article 'Readings of Allegory: Rhetorical Approaches to Lautréamont' (1989)<sup>28</sup> reviewing modern theoretical approaches to the text. More specialized literature on Ducasse and Maldoror splits roughly into three time periods: nearly contemporary (pre-World War I) opinions; the polemic Surrealist hegemony of the 1920s; and post-World War I literary criticism. This last features overlapping critical trends of opinion and philosophy, biography and publication history, rhetoric and structure, and psychology and ethics.

The most comprehensive guide to late 19th-century critical opinion on Lautréamont is Maurice Saillet's *Les Inventeurs de Maldoror*;<sup>29</sup> the section "Avant le

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<sup>27</sup> I am here referring to the author of *Maldoror* as "Ducasse" following Jean-Jacques Lefrère in the most authoritative biography of Lautréamont/Ducasse.

<sup>28</sup> Paragraph 12, pp. 158-70

<sup>29</sup> originally published in two articles in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* in 1954, appearing in book form in 1992

surréalisme” in de Haes’ *Images* is extremely thorough as well. The “Jeunes Belgique”<sup>30</sup> found *Maldoror* morally and thematically fascinating but stylistically irritating and seemed in general agreement that the text demonstrated in its author a quality that wavered between genius and insanity. French writers of the period in turn discovered *Maldoror* when their acquaintances among the Jeunes Belgique (e.g., Max Waller, Emile Verhaeren, Jules Destrée) sent copies of the book to them. The reaction of these French authors in the 1880s was more mixed than that of their Belgian friends. J.-K. Huysmans, author of *À Rebours*, was ambivalent; while intrigued and generally approving, he had reservations about Ducasse’s style and was not among those who named the author of *Maldoror* a genius (De Haes 60-61). In contrast, Léon Bloy (an author noted for the furious intensity of his opinions) did consider Ducasse exceptionally brilliant and wrote about *Maldoror* a number of times; he also believed that Ducasse was a tragic figure with traces of madness. It seems to have once again been the author’s style in *Maldoror* that Bloy found troubling (De Haes 62-63). Several prominent French writers in the 1890s were devotees of Ducasse who lacked previous commentators’ reserves about the Maldororian style. The essayist and novelist Remy de Gourmont was unabashedly in awe, although convinced that Ducasse was insane (De Haes 66); the controversial playwright Alfred Jarry used numerous allusions to, and quotations from, *Maldoror* in both essays and drama (De Haes 69-70). Work on *Maldoror* then experienced a diminution until the Surrealists adopted it after the publication of a new edition in 1920.

The Surrealists, led by André Breton, approached Ducasse with near idolatry, irrespective of his sanity. Bréton, in his 1929 “Seconde Manifeste du Surréalisme,”

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<sup>3030</sup> young Belgian writers of the 1880s and 1890s involved with the literary periodical *La Jeune Belgique*

insists that the cult of Great Men is anathema – except for the author of *Maldoror*. He declares that “il faut se défier du culte des hommes, si grands apparemment soient-ils. Un seul à part : Lautréamont” (Breton 2). Though there were dissenters among the Surrealists, the majority reflected Breton’s attitude to a greater or lesser extent (see the articles in *Le Disque Vert*’s 1925 special issue devoted to ‘Lautréamont’). In general, the Surrealists’ commentaries had a flavor more akin to hagiography or self-referential scriptural exegesis than to professional literary criticism. For them, Ducasse himself was a visionary rebel who prefigured their own movement and the rejection of all tradition; certainly, the shock value of Ducasse’s prose and his outrageous imagery contributed to the widespread Surrealist adoration, but the author’s presumed radicalism and esotericism appear to have excited them even more.

The lack of analytical criticism on Ducasse’s work by his devotees stems in part from the exceptionalism that the Surrealists found there and their worship of the man himself. De Hays cuttingly characterizes the Surrealists’ attitude toward literary criticism of Ducasse: “Tout essai d’explication classique et scientifique des écrits de Ducasse leur parut un sacrilège ... Il aurait été insupportable que son œuvre passât par la main impie des philologues et des critiques” (De Haes 90). De Haes is merely offering the essence of what prominent Surrealists had themselves stated; Breton (Arland 90), Louis Aragon (Aragon 205), and Paul Éluard (Arland 95), all insisted on the blasphemous nature of attempts at “traditional” literary criticism of Ducasse. Dissident Surrealists like Jean Hytier or Jean Cassou who were willing to consider the possibility of analyzing *Maldoror* were often those who had critical reservations regarding Ducasse.

The influence of Surrealism declined after the Second World War, even as the amount of critical work on Ducasse's work grew. Among the more influential authors who took a philosophical or participatory approach was Maurice Blanchot; his essay "L'Expérience de Lautréamont" (one half of his monograph *Lautréamont et Sade*) presented readers with an explication of Ducasse's work that denies the possibility of analysis of the text by discrete themes or qualities.<sup>31</sup> He insists that the critic and reader immerse themselves in the work and arrive at an appreciation of its significance from an internal and experiential point of view. At times such participatory criticism includes biographical elements, but there are many pure biographies and publication histories of Ducasse available.

The most comprehensive biography to date is the work mentioned earlier by Lefrère, *Isidore Ducasse : auteur des Chants de Maldoror, par le comte de Lautréamont* (Paris : Fayard, 1998). At 686 pages, it details Ducasse's life minutely (insofar as possible with that mysterious author) and incorporates not only previous biographies but a broad range of primary source materials as well. An extensive biography of Ducasse must of necessity include discussions of the publication history of Ducasse's writings, and in the corpus of biographical works on the author of *Maldoror* one can gain a great deal of information on that text's various versions and distribution.

Another prevalent critical trend is analysis of rhetoric and structure. This broad category obviously incorporates a variety of specific approaches. For example, Marcelin Pleyne offers an examination of stylistics and topoi in his 1967 *Lautréamont par lui-*

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<sup>31</sup> Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963

*même*; M. Pierssens turns to semiotics<sup>32</sup> in what *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* calls a “belligerent article, occasionally unintelligible”<sup>33</sup> that follows the approach of the celebrated Julia Kristeva and her complex theories.<sup>34</sup> Ora Avni's *Tics, Tics, et Tics* cogently analyzes *Maldoror*'s structure in the context of rhetorical argument and persuasive theory. Claude Bouché utilizes a related structural approach toward form centering on parody and satire in his 1976 article “Lautréamont: l'enjeu d'une écriture parodique” (Bouché 42-46). Bouché notes that the structural bases for Ducasse's parody (e.g., mock epic) lie, at least in part, in his classical lycée education. Bouché reproduces some of the model compositions used in lycée courses, convincingly demonstrating the connection between Ducasse's writing and the materials he studies during his schooling . Apart, however, from these certainties about Ducasse's readings in lycée, it is nearly impossible to determine positively what other works he read that would have influenced the composition of *Maldoror* with a very few exceptions. De Haes and Lefrère both note that Ducasse seems to have repeated, almost word for word, certain passages from Doctor Chenu's *Encyclopédie d'Histoire naturelle*; the quibble in this case is whether Ducasse actually read the multi-volume work attentively or just looked up facts about particular creatures (e.g., birds and scarab beetles) (De Haes 49; Jean-Jacques Lefrère 488-489); Lèfrere also mentions “pillages” from a text on Egyptology. We simply do not know and cannot know. There is a great deal of inference, but few solid facts. Ducasse kept no journal, wrote no memoirs, and did not (as far as we can tell) keep notebooks of his

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<sup>32</sup> 'Administration des signes et sémiotique de la complexité. Le cas Lautréamont', *Critique*, 372:493-511

<sup>33</sup> Lethbridge, Robert. “THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (POST-ROMANTIC).” *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies*, vol. 40, 1978, pg. 179

<sup>34</sup> See J. Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil; 1974, mostly about Mallarmé with a lesser amount regarding Ducasse.



readings. In his correspondence he mentions his favorite literary authors (e.g, Alfred de Musset, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo) and states that he took inspiration from their presentation of “evil” (Pleyne 48), but that provides no information about his non-literary readings. Turning to the speculation over the years about Ducasse’s other sources and knowledge, there is some very suggestive evidence about the author’s probable readings. Even so, these inferences are not conclusive, or even universally accepted. In general, such theories rely on stylistic and factual parallels between Ducasse’s text and other works, but there is no proof of either the accuracy of the connections or Ducasse’s intentions. It would be reasonable, however to suggest that at the very Ducasse was familiar with the aspects of psychological theory that had penetrated the larger culture. This phenomenon is present even in our current society; thanks to true crime shows and various fictional works (in text or media), much of the public has at least a partial knowledge of the presumed characteristics of criminals and investigative procedures.

Whether because of the lack of explicit connections between *Maldoror* and works on psychological theories of Ducasse’s time or because of a lack of interest, critics analyzing *Maldoror* rarely examine contemporary psychological theories. One of the eternal difficulties of *Maldoror* is distinguishing between the eponymous character, the narrative persona, and Ducasse the author; it is therefore unsurprising that most of the psychological criticism of the work psychoanalyzes Ducasse himself. An extreme but prominent work of this kind is the 1964 book *Lautréamont: génie ou maladie mentale?* by Jean-Pierre Soulier. Despite being a doctor, Soulier made no pretensions to being a

psychiatrist<sup>35</sup>; he utilized a combination of modern and 19th-century psychological theories to characterize Ducasse via the pathologies that he (Soulier) detected in Ducasse's narrative and protagonist. Outside of Soulier's work, criticism incorporating 19th-century psychological theories is rare; in general, Freudian or post-Freudian psychological approaches predominate; the blurry line between author and character, however, is a near-constant. Even works that are essentially valuable, insightful studies of the psychological aspects of *Maldoror* suffer from dilution of their point by the confusion; a particular example of this is Paul Zweig's admirable *Lautréamont: The Violent Narcissus*. Despite the title, the book is not a psychological profile of Ducasse; Zweig's focus is ultimately the work rather than the author, though even he slides at times between characterizing Maldoror (the character) and Ducasse. He makes excellent points about the psychology of Ducasse's manipulation of his readers and the narcissistic, grandiose qualities that Ducasse incorporates into his "hero" and the ties between narcissism and the dark humor of the work. Critics apply numerous other modern schools of psychology to *Maldoror* and its author as well. Among these others, classic Freudian psychoanalysis is popular, particularly in the context of a homosexual protagonist Maldoror/the author Ducasse; see, for example, the analyses of Bruno Guitard of the homosexual sublimation of Ducasse's reader in *Les Valenciennes*<sup>36</sup> and of the morally subversive qualities of *Maldoror*'s homoeroticism in *Europe*<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Lefrère notes about Soulier's approach "Jean-Pierre Soulier ne s'était pas donné pour propos de porter un diagnostic psychiatrique—il s'en défendait même—mais voulait montrer qu'une oeuvre littéraire peut être conçue par un auteur chez lequel le génie créateur cohabite avec une pathologie mentale." Lefrère, J. J. "Jean-Pierre Soulier écrivain." *Transfusion Clinique et Biologique*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2004, pp. 71-73, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tracli.2003.12.004>.

<sup>36</sup> *Les Valenciennes*, 13, 1990, 'Malediction ou revolution poetique. Lautreamont/Rimbaud' (Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle), pp. 45-54

<sup>37</sup> *Europe*, 64, nos. 700-01, 1987, 'Lautréamont', pp. 68-77

Psychological criticism of Ducasse's works has been, and continues to be, a particularly fruitful area of study.

CRIMINAL GENIUS – *LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR*

My approach departs from the mainstream of the rich critical literature of *Maldoror* principally in the centrality of pre-Freud 19th-century psychological theories to my analysis. I explore the pathological psychological “type” that Ducasse designed in his character by the standards and models of his own time: essentially, a criminal *monomane* – a “monomane homicide,” in Etienne Esquirol's terminology. It is, in fact, surprising that more critics have not investigated the French psychological literature contemporary to Ducasse, given the sometimes striking parallels between the actions he attributes to his character and case studies occurring in that psychological literature. There is no way to know whether or not Ducasse ever read popularized works on psychology, but at the very least the correspondences are an indication of a knowledge on the authors part of the tropes of insanity in his own culture. In addition, Ducasse's biography is minor in the context of my analysis and his own mental state irrelevant.

*Les Chants de Maldoror* is a work in which the author weaves insanity into and out of the narrative. Critics like Soulier may quibble about whether this madness belongs to the protagonist alone or to the author as well, but for my purposes it is Ducasse's representation of his protagonist's mental instability that is at issue. It is necessary to note neither the narrator nor the protagonist is ipso facto the author; despite the focus in the critical literature on deducing Ducasse's mental state and ethical views from the text, one cannot assume that the narrator or the protagonist in *Maldoror* replicates Ducasse's own views and characteristics. The distinction in *Maldoror* between author (or authorial

persona), narrator, and protagonist is often unclear; at times, it is possible to identify the voice of the narrator or that of the eponymous character, but frequently the reader is left in hazy uncertainty. *Maldoror* begins with a first-person dramatized narrator; stanza one of Canto one opens with the narrator explicitly by identifying himself as an authorial persona (not identical to Ducasse): “Plût que ciel que le lecteur ... trouve, sans se désorienter, son chemin abrupt et sauvages à travers les marécages désolés de ces pages sombres et pleins de poison” (Lautréamont 99). In this mock-epic invocation, Ducasse in addition has his narrator convey to the reader the disturbing quality that the narrative will take. In the next three stanzas it is relatively clear that the narrator is still the authorial persona; in each of stanzas one through four, the narrating “I” speaks of writing, mentioning his protagonist and themes. He mentions his protagonist, Maldoror, and introduces the themes of cruelty and genius. Throughout the first five Cantos, in fact, it is only when there is a self-conscious reference to writing or the narrative that we can be certain that the narrative focus is the authorial persona (e.g., in the first stanzas of Cantos II, IV, and V). Beginning with stanza five of Canto one, however, the identity of the speaker is no longer clear. There is still a narrating “I,” but there are no longer any comments about writing or overt statements to the “lecteur.” In stanza five the narrative focus begins, instead, to relate incidents from the past and characterize himself; there is a cruelty in the narrative here that does not necessarily accord with the authorial persona’s previous tone, but that does conform to what the authorial persona narrator had offered as his subject. While it is possible that the authorial persona is still narrating and speaking of himself, it is equally possible there has been an implicit shift to Maldoror’s voice narrating his own story. Such cases where there is a lack of explicit clues to the identity

of the narrative voice abound in the narrative, though in first-person stanzas that do not have these clues but are recollections or self-description there is a strong presupposition that the narrative voice is, indeed, Maldoror (e.g., I.6, II.13, IV.5). At other points the narration switches to the third person with an undramatized narrator; in such a case it is wisest to refer to the narrative voice simply as the “narrator.” Of course, the real author, Isidore Ducasse, is always behind the scenes creating the various narrative voices. An additional complicating factor is that neither the narrative persona nor the protagonist seems entirely sane; both, however, repeatedly express deep certainty in thought and deed, even if the verbal surface of the narrative suggests otherwise.

Criminal violence and self-proclaimed “genius” are the essential elements of the text; late nineteenth-century psychological theories provide support for the depiction of the protagonist (and/or narrator) as *monomane*. Clinical psychologists of the late-nineteenth century recognized and popularized the notion that criminal *monomanes* have a certain set of indicators of psychological instability. Apropos to differentiation between the insane and those who are physically ill or immoral, Casimir Pinel affirmed “ Un médecin attentif et expérimenté arrive plus ou moins promptement, dans la plupart des cas, à établir cette différence qui échappe, au contraire, à ceux qui n'ont pas l'habitude de voir des fous (Pinel 71).” in common with many other psychologists of the time, he felt that it was possible to determine the mental status of an individual via close observation of the patient's health, history, and the rationality of their acts. Commenting, for example, on an 1865 arson<sup>38</sup> trial, Prosper Despine noted the common motivation behind *monomanie incendiaire* (arson) and *monomanie homicide*: pleasure in setting fires “caractérise la

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<sup>38</sup> monomanie incendiaire

monomanie incendiaire, de même que tuer pour satisfaire le penchant anomal de tuer est ce qui caractérise la monomanie homicide (Despine *Étude sur les facultés* vol. 3, 144);" committing criminal acts for the pleasure it brings is one of the major characteristics of a criminal *monomane*. Despine adds "c'est à coup sûr la plus dangereuse, celle qui se manifeste par des penchants qui ne sont pas naturels à l'humanité, par les monomanies criminelles (Despine *Étude sur les facultés* vol. 3, 146)." In addition to their lack of moral center, *monomanes* are also, according to late-nineteenth French psychologists, incapable of differentiating between real life and their own mental landscape:

il est certain qu'il pourra associer l'objet illusoire avec l'objet réel, de telle sorte que, dans ses réponses, il mêlera ce qui est réel pour tout le monde avec ce qui n'a de réalité que pour lui seul (Szafkowski 291-292)

Szafkowski's statement is typical of the era's psychological theories: the *monomane* is convinced that their self-generated reality is the only true reality.

*Les Chants de Maldoror* is divided into six "cantos," the first five of which each contain multiple "strophes" [stanzas]. Late in the work, the narrator/Maldoror defines the nature and function of the first five Cantos; he warns the reader that "Cette préface hybride ... surprend, pour ainsi dire, le lecteur, qui ne voit pas très-bien où l'on veut d'abord le conduire" (285). Ducasse explicitly acknowledges the impossibility of defining the form of his narrative in Cantos one through five. It is a mock epic, yet in prose; he bases the narrative in part on scholastic composition models, but his imagery and subject matter differ emphatically; his text has the feeling of prose poetry, but the author cribbed on occasion from academic sources<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, *Maldoror's* form does

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<sup>39</sup> See my previous discussion of sources.

confuse the reader and leads to intense uncertainty. The last Canto is unique; as the narrator/Maldoror explicitly informs the reader, it contains a handful of “strophes,” but is in large part “a small novel”: “Aujourd’hui, je vais fabriquer un petit roman de trente pages...je crois avoir enfin trouvé ... ma formule définitive. C’est la meilleure: puisque c’est le roman!” (*Lautréamont*). This “novel” is a small portion of the complete text; his declaration that the narrative in Canto six is “the best” and “definitive” form might be his true opinion, but it may also be an ironic statement. Prose fiction obviously attracted him since he included it in a text where the form is impossible to truly classify; even so, the fact that this narrative is only a small portion of the text would suggest that he actually found the fixed narrative prose form less intriguing than a more fluid combination of forms. As a prose narrative, Canto six has chapters like a novel (despite a few poetic “strophes”). Certain elements in this last Canto correspond to case studies in French psychological literature of the time; specifically, some of the protagonist’s mental processes and criminal actions echo the mental processes and criminal actions of the *monomanes* these psychologists explore in real-life examples.

An important aspect of the narrator’s and the protagonist’s mental processes that echoes *monomanie orgueilleuse* is the assertion of genius. Ducasse has his narrator posit a general theory about the tie between cruelty and genius in the both the natural order of the universe and in the tale the author has formulated. He declares

Le génie ne peut-il pas s'allier avec la cruauté dans les résolutions secrètes  
de la Providence? ou, parce qu'on est cruel, ne peut-on pas avoir du génie?  
On en verra la preuve dans mes paroles; il ne tient qu'à vous de m'écouter,  
si vous le voulez bien... (*Lautréamont* 71)

Through his narrator, the author thus not only establishes the theme of *monomanie orgueilleuse* but adds that its “alliance” with *monomanie furieuse* and *monomanie homicide* as well. Ducasse here dares the reader to continue reading his text, partly to discover the truth of this psychological combination. The author specifically attributes this mental state to both his narrator and his protagonist at various points in the text; the declarations he puts in their mouths express this clearly. These declarations imply the self-generated reality Szafkowski described in his characterization of *monomanie*; they demonstrate absolute conviction of the validity of the reality only they can perceive and its absolute verity. In the first Canto, Ducasse has his narrator assert “Moi, je fais servir mon génie à peindre les délices de la cruauté (Lautréamont 71).” The narrator’s boast not only affirms his own genius, but his infatuation with cruelty as well; this statement provides a vivid expression of the ties between *monomanie orgueilleuse*, *monomanie furieuse*, and *monomanie homicide*. The narrator claims that he will use self-proclaimed genius to depict violence and viciousness.

Ducasse has his narrator describe Maldoror’s genius as well as his own. In the sixth Canto, he speaks of Maldoror’s amazing talent “pour prendre des formes méconnaissables au yeux exercés. Déguisements supérieurs, si je parle en artiste (Lautréamont 286).” Expert and artistic disguises are not equivalent to cruelty, but the narrator adds an ironic qualification to his statement that does hint at cruelty: “Accoutrements d’un effet réellement médiocre, quand je songe à la morale (Lautréamont 71).” In his protagonist, Ducasse limns a character who is, according to the words of the narrator the author shaped, brilliant but amoral. Even so, the narrator continues with a reaffirmation of Maldoror’s brilliance: “Par ce point, il touchait presque au génie



(Lautréamont 286).” The author thus suggests that his protagonist is as chimerical as his reality, mysterious and deceitful. Maldoror himself not only proclaims his own genius but claims a *superior level* of genius to what may or may not be a truly malevolent shadow – or its source: “ton génie s’incline de lui-même devant le mien (234).” In each case, there is a certain unusual quality to the genius of the narrator or Maldoror: it is connected to cruelty (and therefore to criminal *monomanie*); it is related to secrecy and dissimulation, or it is impressive in comparison to that of an immaterial entity.

It is partly this twining of *monomanie ambitieuse* (genius) and cruelty that ties *Maldoror* to criminal forms of *monomanie* as understood by nineteenth century French psychologists. The pioneering alienist Etienne Esquirol (1772-1840) wrote extensively about the general phenomenon of *monomanie* in criminals. While introducing the term *monomanie homicide* in his book *Note sur la monomanie homicide* (1827), Esquirol delineates the characteristics of the condition, and its characteristics correspond to the character of Maldoror:

le meurtre est provoqué par une conviction intime, mais délirante; par l'exaltation de l'imagination égarée; par un raisonnement faux, ou par les passions en délire. Toujours, le monomane est mû par un motif avoué et déraisonnable (Esquirol 5)

Ducasse established Maldoror as a *monomane homicide*, one who kills from an inner conviction that all of his thoughts and actions are valid, he provided hallucinatory images of violence for his protagonist, and he established the character’s irrationality by the standards of shared common experience. Achille Foville, another extremely prolific alienist, was more specific about the characteristics of *monomanie orgueilleuse* in criminals,

describing symptoms that closely match Maldoror's assertions of his own genius:

*monomanes orgueiuses* are

pour ainsi dire forcément amenées à composer un roman dans lequel [the  
*monomanes*] font jouer le rôle principal à quelque agent inconnu ou  
surnaturel auquel elles donnent un nom en rapport avec le mystère et la  
puissance qu'elles lui attribuent. (Foville 344)

Throughout the work, various agents oppose the protagonist; one of the most essential of these is God – the Creator. Ducasse firmly establishes Maldoror's perception of God: the protagonist himself is the more powerful, the more extraordinary, and the more deific of the two. Once again, the author draws attention to Maldoror's *monomanie d'orgueil*, this time in terms of his imagined relationship with (and superiority to) the Creator; who but a genius could be divine to the point of surpassing the supreme being?

The *monomanie orgueiuse* with which Ducasse endows his protagonist is, according to nineteenth-century psychological theories, an element of criminal *monomanie*; the author has already suggested this relationship in his connection of genius and cruelty. The author also shapes Maldoror's *monomanie homicide* through his portrayal of his criminal acts and violent inner narrative. Ducasse constitutes Maldoror's essential criminality through a complex web of different types of criminality. Murder, with the characteristics Esquirol enumerated, has the most explicit connection to criminal *monomanie*, but other perverse violations abound in the text.

Unlike in Flaubert and Maupassant, no genuine realization on the part of Maldoror or the narrator that the he, Maldoror, is truly insane; any statement that appears to concede negative aspects of the protagonist's character are ironic and undercut. Even Maldoror's

seeming admissions of madness and/or criminality turn into self-justifying boasts. For example, within an anecdote about a shipwreck Ducasse formulates an apparent confession of misdeeds (including murder) for his protagonist; in this confession, however, Maldoror recognizes that others see him as criminal while he subtly excuses his own violent tendencies. He declaims

je n'étais pas aussi cruel qu'on l'a raconté ensuite, parmi les hommes; mais, des fois, leur méchanceté exerçait ses ravages persévérants pendant des années entières. Alors, je ne connaissais plus de borne à ma fureur; il me prenait des accès de cruauté (Lautréamont 178)

The author has Maldoror minimize his cruelty by insisting that other people had magnified it out of malice; he then places the blame for his violence on those same people, maintaining that it is this malice on the part of others that irresistibly provokes his viciousness. A few sentences later, the author writes Maldoror piously acknowledging his irrationality and the evil of his actions; the author undercuts this humble remorse with the revelation that the protagonist had been deceiving his audience for with the *mea culpa*:

j'étais dans un de ces accès, ma raison s'était envolée ... je ne prétends pas m'excuser de mes torts. La faute n'en est pas toute à mes semblables. Je ne fais que constater ce qui est, en attendant le jugement dernier ... Que m'importe le jugement dernier ! Ma raison ne s'envole jamais, comme je le disais pour vous tromper. Et, quand je commets un crime, je sais ce que je fais : je ne voulais pas faire autre chose ! (Lautréamont 178-179)

The undercutting is explicit in this passage. The phrase “je ne prétends pas m’excuser de mes torts” has two possible interpretations: Maldoror either contends that he is not *claiming to apologize* for his wrongdoing (i.e., his words are not enough to redeem himself) or he says that he doesn’t *claim that he is apologizing* for his deeds (i.e., he’s not really apologizing at all). This ambiguous statement introduces a play of assertion and denial that exposes his simultaneous awareness of violating society’s laws and mores, and his true lack of empathy for anyone but himself. He was gripped with uncontrollable rage, but when he kills it is always a conscious seeking of pleasure; he was in an irrational state, but he never loses his reason; he is waiting for the Last Judgement, but it means nothing to him. The assertions in the false confession are what common morality demands, but the later ones are expressions of Maldoror’s self-generated *monomaniaque* reality.

We can note further similarities with case studies of real criminal *monomanes* in Ducasse’s creation of a protagonist in whom disingenuousness melds with amorality. In the sixth stanza of Canto one, Maldoror gives a recipe for an attack upon an “adolescent.” The author crafts a monologue for Maldoror in which the character proposes a speech that a victimizer could give his victim (or his victim’s spirit):

Est-ce un délire de ma raison malade, est-ce un instinct secret qui ne dépend pas de mes raisonnements, pareil à celui de l’aigle déchirant sa proie qui m’a poussé à commettre ce crime et pourtant, autant que ma victime, je souffrais (Lautréamont 105)

The phrases that Ducasse shaped for Maldoror echo Esquirol’s descriptions of *monomanie homicide*; Maldoror posits a possible disorder in his intellectual processes,

comparable to Esquirol's "false reasoning" and "stated irrational motive" mentioned earlier, but the protagonist also alludes to other qualities to be found in *monomanes homicides*. The protagonist also suggests that the crime might be impulsive, stemming from animal-like instinct; this explanation parallels another of Esquirol's characterizations of *monomanie homicide* in which "le monomane homicide ... est entraîné par un instinct aveugle, par une idée; par quelque chose d'indéfinissable qui le pousse à tuer" (Esquirol 6). Whether one finds fallacious self-justification or blind animal instinct more likely as a motivation for Maldoror's, the protagonist's statements reveal criminal *monomanie* underneath.

Maldoror's claim that author of such a crime suffers just as his victim does is also typical of criminal *monomanie*. Despine succinctly noted of a *monomane* murderer "il demande pitié pour lui, mais il n'exprime aucun regret sur son crime" (Despine *Étude sur les facultés* 415). The author explores this desire for pity and lack of regret on the part of his protagonist throughout the work. In a similar, but more subtle series of declarations in the fourth stanza of Canto four, Ducasse has Maldoror portray himself simultaneously as a creature of hatred and violence and a martyr, the latter in a particularly self-conscious and melodramatic fashion. He apostrophizes to a traveler "Laisse-moi réchauffer ma ténacité à la flamme du martyr volontaire... Va-t'en...[sic] que je ne t'inspire aucune pitié" (Lautréamont 231). Maldoror emphasizes his suffering even while falsely disavowing any desire for sympathy; both his "voluntary martyrdom" and his stoic rejection of pity cloak him in virtue. He continues, however, by declaring that "La haine est plus bizarre que tu ne le penses; sa conduite est inexplicable" this characterization of hatred as abnormal and unaccountable heralds Maldoror's return to

discourse on cruelty and violence (Lautréamont 231). Ducasse then reveals his protagonist's underlying criminal nature with a declaration by Maldoror that fuses arrogance, hatred, and killing:

Tel que tu me vois, je puis encore faire des excursions jusqu'aux murailles  
du ciel, à la tête d'une légion d'assassins et revenir prendre cette posture,  
pour méditer, de nouveau, sur les nobles projets de la vengeance  
(Lautréamont 231-232).

Maldoror's assertion highlights his power and his fixation on violence; he is mighty enough to storm Heaven, but would do so for murderous purposes, and the subject of his later contemplation would be vengeance (an inherently brutal goal). To cap off this self-serving portrait, the author attributes to his protagonist claims that this tale can enlighten the traveler about the relationship between good and evil. Maldoror claims that there is great significance in his current violent character versus his praiseworthy origins. He suffered from a "sort fatal qui m'a conduit à la révolte" though he was "Peut-être né bon" (Lautréamont 232). The act of averring that his criminal behavior is due to fate despite being born (perhaps) with moral sense merely underlines his essential lack of remorse.

A psychologist particularly active in the late 1860s and 1870s, Firmin Lagardelle, described a case study that corresponds to Maldoror's self-evaluation. Like Ducasse's protagonist, M. "X" was a martyr and beyond society's rules; according to Lagardelle, "il est souffrant, puis baron, roi, Dieu" (Lagardelle *Histoire clinique de la folie avec prédominance du délire des grandeurs* 46); belief that one is both suffering and exalted is an essential element in the *monomanie d'orgueil* that Ducasse explores in the character of Maldoror. More generally, Lagardelle observes that in similar cases the *monomane's*

“facultés affectives sont toujours perverses, au délire des grandeurs sont venues se joindre des idées de persécution qui se sont généralisées” (Lagardelle *Histoire clinique de la folie avec prédominance du délire des grandeurs* 46). Though he does not specifically add “lying,” it is implied in the concepts of both “delusions of grandeur” and “persecution complex”. Taken together, the parallels between Lagardelle’s model and Ducasse’s depiction of Maldoror’s mental peculiarities are striking. From time to time, the protagonist hints at knowledge of his own deception; shortly after he claims to have been born “good” (see above), Maldoror denies that he has ever claimed goodness. At this particular point, he refuses to pretend that he has been virtuous: “Je ne jetterai pas à tes pieds le masque de la vertu, pour paraître à tes yeux tel que je suis; car, je ne l’ai jamais porté (si toutefois, c’est là une excuse)” (Lautréamont 234). If we are to believe Maldoror, all his previous declarations of martyrdom or goodness were a deception or an excuse – in either case, his self-proclaimed virtue is a disguise. We already know that Maldoror is a master of deception; taking his contradictory statements together, he could be lying at any particular moment, whether about being good or about being evil. This is an indication that for Maldoror, he and he alone is central to his universe; this, the plasticity of truth and the disregard for consistency is a telling indicator for *monomanie* and springs from the *monomane*’s personal self-generated reality. Szafkowski insisted on the unreliability of *monomanes*, and their unreliability in separating hallucination from fact:

dans la monomanie avec les illusions des sens, l'imagination créant des chimères, transformant les objets, on ne pourrait avoir de confiance dans les récits de ces malades (Szafkowski 292)

Placing faith in the accuracy of a *monomane*'s accounts or reminiscences is foolhardy; as Esquirol notes a similar phenomenon in his earlier text on *monomanes homicides*, "Convaincus que ce qu'ils sentent est vrai, que ce qu'ils veulent est juste et raisonnable" (Esquirol 4). In *monomanie*, hallucination and desire distort or deny facts and fidelity to empirical reality.

In Ducasse's portraits of Maldoror's more dramatic crimes, it is similarly impossible to tell apart fantasy, delusion, exaggeration, and fact. It would be extraordinarily difficult to detail all of his violent acts, but certain representative vignettes of crimes are sufficient to illustrate Maldoror's perverted and criminal nature. Such vignettes illustrate as well the protagonist's constant self-contradiction regarding his own morality and rationality. To a certain extent, these criminal anecdotes act not only as a source of shock to the reader, but also as extended and particularly vivid demonstrations of Maldoror's criminal *monomanie* (discussed above); the reader observes Maldoror's twisted mental processes at the same time as his equally twisted actions.

There are a number of episodes in which the protagonist viciously attacks an adolescent (pre-pubescent) boy; the first instance of this favorite pastime of Maldoror's occurs as early as the first canto (stanza six) in the protagonist's exhortation to the audience to indulge in such violence. In this first incident, Ducasse introduces the audience to the range of his (possibly real) outrages and to his obsessions, all which will appear over and over again in his other crimes. During the course of this small blood-soaked suggestion to the reader, the audience sees kidnapping; torture; vampirism; faux-rescue; masochism; and maiming. Maldoror also demonstrates pathological fixations on



blood and hair. Ducasse begins the episode with a description of a particularly violent kidnapping, and Maldoror's instructions for demonstrating feigned love for the victim:

On doit laisser pousser ses ongles pendant quinze jours. Oh! comme il est doux d'arracher brutalement de son lit un enfant qui n'a rien encore sur la lèvre supérieure, ... de faire semblant de passer suavement la main sur son front, en inclinant en arrière ses beaux cheveux! (Lautréamont 102)

The protagonist reinforces his all-encompassing hatred in his characterizations of this criminal act, yet he simultaneously acknowledges that the loving and tender gestures he specifies are disingenuous; once again he undercuts his own words by his actions and imagery. He defines his act of kidnapping with the phrase "arracher brutalement de son lit," a truly violent wrenching that implies fear and pain. In addition to this reflection of Maldoror's innate loathing for humanity, Ducasse presents his protagonist's ability to perfectly mimic gentleness and compassion by describing the caring gesture of stroking the boy's head.

After the kidnapping, the protagonist continues his prescription for brutality with sadistic torture. Alluding to the earlier comment that it is necessary to grow one's fingernails out for fifteen days, the author illustrates Maldoror's fantasy of using the nails to torture the victim:

Puis ... d'enfoncer les ongles longs dans sa poitrine molle, de façon qu'il ne meure pas; car, s'il mourait, on n'aurait pas plus tard l'aspect de ses misères. (Lautréamont 104)

Here Maldoror shows a taste for images of extremely personal cruelty; the torture comes not merely from the delivery of pain itself (digging his nails into the boy's chest), but

also from the sadistic need to spare the adolescent's life rather than torturing the youth to death. Obviously, torture depends on the victim remaining alive, but Maldoror's explicit justification that one must openly revel in a victim's pain reveals the truly extreme nature of his pathology. The episode then displays the speaker's devotion to everlasting torture, as well as introducing his fixation on blood. Maldoror explains that

Ensuite, on boit le sang en léchant les blessures; et, pendant ce temps, qui  
devrait durer autant que l'éternité dure, l'enfant pleure ... nourris-toi avec  
confiance des larmes et du sang de l'adolescent. (103-104)

In the psychological literature of the time, we find a case study of *monomanie homicide* that bears a striking similarity to Maldoror's combination of torture and vampirism; according to the studies of C.C.H. Marc, during the patient's violent episodes, he reacts to other men in the following manner:

Il éprouvait, *en croyant voir couler le sang dans les veines de cet homme,*  
*le désir irrésistible de le sucer et de déchirer ses membres à belles dents*  
*pour rendre la succion<sup>40</sup> plus facile.* [emphasis in original] (Marc 407)

This correspondence suggests that, at least for *monomanes homicides*, criminal obsession with blood has at least one defining element: drinking the blood that results from mutilation of the victim. It is, as previously mentioned, impossible to know if Ducasse was familiar with this particular case study, but there easily may have been knowledge in society at large of this particular, vivid characteristic of a blood-obsessed criminal.

Beyond Maldoror's similarities to this *monomane*, the identification of blood and tears (and his suggestion that one can take sustenance from them) imply that he sees

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<sup>40</sup> sucking

torture as either beneficial to one's health or as a treat. Once again, he neither wants nor sees any halt to these criminal actions, fantasizing them as lasting as long as eternity. Even now, in the midst of Maldoror's violence, Ducasse formulates a self-portrait by the protagonist who limns the tormentor in this scenario in a dual role: the tormentor and the savior. As we have already seen, Maldoror presents disingenuous portraits of his proclivities frequently, undercutting the virtue he claims in his self-characterization. This section contains an early example of the protagonist's penchant for deception combined with violence:

Bande-lui les yeux, pendant que tu déchireras ses chairs palpitants; et,  
après avoir entendu de longues heures ses cris sublimes ... tu te  
précipiteras de la chambre voisine, et tu feras semblant d'arriver à son  
secours... en te remettant à lécher ses larmes et son sang. Lautréamont  
(104)

Maldoror's words reinforce his love of cruelty and duplicity; once again, Ducasse includes traits reminiscent of the lunatic in Marc's case study. In having Maldoror give authoritative instructions for a false rescue of his victim, Ducasse implies his protagonist's conviction that an obsession with torture and the deceptive role of savior are rational and logical elements of his self-generated reality; this phenomenon is characteristic of the mental state represented by the pair  $\frac{\text{method (means)}}{(\text{empirical}) \text{ result}}$ . While the protagonist notes that it is necessary to seemingly "save" the adolescent, he utterly undermines any possible altruism in this act by both his explicit use of the phrase "feras semblant" and by the repetition of the previous suggestions for vampiristic behavior.

In Ducasse's characterization of his protagonist, Maldoror does not take pleasure only in inflicting pain, but also in experiencing pain inflicted on him by others. The term "masochism," characterized by "recurrent, intense sexual fantasies, urges, or behavior involving submission to pain, humiliation, bondage, or some other form of physical or psychological suffering," was introduced sixteen years after the publication of *Maldoror* (1886), so Ducasse would not have used this particular classification of his protagonists' delight in his own pain, yet in this section Maldoror demonstrates predilections for the defining elements of this condition (Andrew M. Colman). Canto I.6 demonstrates Maldoror's fluency in creating expressions of martyrdom in the midst of suffering and its enjoyment:

Une fois sortis de cette vie passagère, je veux que nous soyons entrelacés  
pendant l'éternité ; ne former qu'un seul être ... Même, de cette manière,  
ma punition ne sera pas complète. Alors, tu me déchireras, sans jamais  
t'arrêter, avec les dents et les ongles à la fois ... nous souffrirons tous les  
deux, moi, d'être déchiré, toi, de me déchirer (Lautréamont 105)

In this portion Ducasse introduces death in Maldoror's vision of a perfect crime; perhaps it is vital to him is that he and his victim be entwined – "entrelacés" – in life or in the afterlife. Maldoror presents a postmortem situation with reversed roles; the former victim of sadism has become the victimizer.

In the sixth stanza of the first Canto, before his masochistic monologue, Maldoror gives a description of the injuries the victim will receive that make it physically impossible for the adolescent to torture his tormentor as he desires: "c'est celui qui est devant ta figure noble et sacrée, qui a brisé tes os et déchiré les chairs qui pendent à

différents endroits de ton corps” (Lautréamont 105). After exploring the masochistic tendencies of the proposed torment of a young boy, Maldoror introduces a desire to be tortured into his criminal formula, but there is no actual risk of this in the hypothetical situation that the author posits. As the author moves forward with the protagonist’s vision of the consequences of such a crime, Maldoror claims that “Plus tard, tu pourras le mettre à l’hôpital; car, le perclus ne pourra pas gagner sa vie” (Lautréamont 105).

Ducasse’s narrative reprises the victimization of adolescent boys throughout the narrative. The last of Maldoror’s adolescent victims appears in the mini-novel of Canto six; this time, after being tortured, the protagonist murders the youth. This homicide contradicts the protagonist’s previous instructions in for the torture of a young victim in the first Canto (to be discussed later) (Lautréamont 208-209).

Ducasse does not limit his protagonist’s murderous violence to young men; he draws his character perpetrating acts of cruelty against female victims as well. Ducasse’s Maldoror is misogynistic as well as a sadist; noting that a young girl will without fail become just like all women, he tells her how he could (and would) victimize her as she deserves, saying

je pourrais te prendre les bras, les tordre comme un linge lavé ... ou les  
casses avec fracas ... et te les faire ensuite manger, en employant la force.  
Je pourrais, en prenant ta tête entre mes mains ... enfoncer mes doigts  
avidés dans les lobes de ton cerveau innocent (Lautréamont 146)

Once again, the author crafts words for his protagonist that display a love of torture, permanent crippling and humiliation; Maldoror continues

Je pourrais, soulevant ton corps vierge avec un bras de fer, te saisir par les  
jambes, te faire rouler autour de moi, comme une fronde, concentrer mes  
forces ... et te lancer contre la muraille ... Sans doute, le corps est resté  
plaqué sur la muraille, comme un poire mûre, et n'est pas tombé à terre  
(*ibid*)

Ultimately, young females share the same fate as young men in the expression of  
Maldoror's criminal pathology: victims of overwhelming interpersonal violence, violence  
whose imagery is almost hallucinatorily vivid and outrageous.

In the first five cantos, Ducasse emphasizes his protagonist's ability to extinguish life  
or inflict physical suffering and the depth of his fantasies about such acts. The "novel" of  
Canto six traces Maldoror's corruption of two young men for an ultimately nefarious  
purpose (one of the youths, Ahgone, is a direct accessory to the destruction of the other,  
Mervyn). The author has Maldoror exploit his charisma and absolute self-confidence to  
seduce Mervyn; the protagonist inculcates strong devotion in the adolescent and becomes  
the latter's idol. Ducasse constructs an emotional letter from Mervyn to Maldoror; in this  
letter, Mervyn writes that

Quand je pense à vous, ma poitrine s'agite, retentissante comme  
l'écroulement d'un empire en décadence car, l'ombre de votre amour  
accuse un sourire qui, peut-être, n'existe pas elle est si vague, et remue ses  
écailles si tortueusement! (Lautréamont 299)

The text of this letter combines love and hesitancy; the youth's heart beats loudly, a  
trope of romance, but he is not completely sure of the character of the protagonist's smile  
(and thus his feelings). Mervyn's not only feels devotion to Maldoror, the adolescent

also sees him as a source of authority; Mervyn has faith in Maldoror, and Maldoror replaces empirical reality with his self-generated reality as fundamental truth for Mervyn. This credulous youth adheres to the belief that Maldoror is indeed a genius, promising “je m’empresserai d’obéir à votre sagesse incontestable” (Lautréamont 298), and “je m’incline humblement à vos genoux, que je presse” (Lautréamont 299).

Hence, by the end of chapter V of Canto 6, Maldoror has already acquired a credulous dupe; Maldoror must now involve yet another believer to balance Mervyn and become a force of destruction. This character, Aghone, is a semi-competent acrobat near the Palais-Royal who is stricken with “les dérèglements de l’aliénation mentale” (Lautréamont 302). Perhaps because of his mental peculiarities, Aghone’s gymnastics are erratic and ridiculous. He manages to stand on his head, but cannot stay steady; he falls, though he is eventually able to balance again:

comme cette situation funambulesque est en dehors des lois de la pesanteur qui régissent le centre de gravité, il est retombé lourdement sur la planche, les bras pendants, la casquette lui cachant la moitié de la figure, et les jambes battant le gravier dans une situation d’équilibre instable. (Lautréamont 301)

With Aghone’s questionable tumbling, Ducasse establishes the acrobat’s instability on both the physical and the mental plane. Maldoror, having watched Aghone’s performance and noted his deficiencies, approaches Aghone: “Il s’est avancé vers le fou, l’a aidé avec bienveillance à remplacer sa dignité dans une position normale, lui a tendu la main, et s’est assis à côté de lui” (Lautréamont 302). Maldoror feigns kindness and understanding, helping Aghone to rebalance his body and self-respect on a superficial

level. The protagonist continues to influence the acrobat with false compassion; “Il console le fou avec une compassion feinte, et essuie ses larmes avec son propre mouchoir” (Lautréamont 305). With these phrases, the author again emphasizes Aghone’s emotional vulnerability and mental illness simultaneously reinforcing the deceptive nature of his protagonist. Maldoror subtly masters Aghone’s damaged psyche; as the narrator/Maldoror reports the *monomane*’s intentions:

Quel était son but? Acquérir un ami à toute épreuve, assez naïf pour obéir au moindre de ses commandements ... Celui qu’il a trouvé ... ne sait plus, depuis un événement de sa jeunesse, reconnaître le bien du mal. C’est Aghone même qu’il lui faut.” (Lautréamont 305-306)

In short, Ducasse posits that Maldoror is seeking a malleable acolyte whose sense of morality is fundamentally flawed; this is what he finds in Aghone. Aghone – already formed by the author as a pathological individual – becomes an extension of Maldoror’s own will, a slave to the protagonist’s soi-disant “genius.” In seeking certainty, the acrobat becomes an essential component in the violent crime that the author invents for Canto six. Ducasse draws Mervyn as a less inherently unstable personality, a purer and more naïve sort of young man, as vulnerable to emotional seduction as Aghon but more suited to the role of victim in Maldoror’s homicidal drama.

In this tale of Mervyn in Chant 6, Ducasse pulls together the panoply of previous elements and examples of Maldoror’s crimes, creating the ultimate expression not only of the protagonist’s criminal nature, but also of the stark danger of believing in the certainty of his genius. It is not the *monomaniaque* soi-disant “genius” who suffers, but the misguided victim who follows such a criminal and allows himself to rely on the



“genius’s” certainty. Ducasse does not create any negative effects for Maldoror for his crime; the protagonist has won and proven again the superiority of himself and his reality. It is Mervyn who experiences the most disastrous consequences – mutilation and death as Maldoror’s victim.

In *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Isidore Ducasse created a vivid exploration of the incompatibility  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; he shaped the universe of his narrative around the psychological traits he incorporated into his protagonist, Maldoror. The author’s formulation of his protagonist’s character echoes certain models of insanity current in the French psychological theories of Ducasse’s time, particularly the type of insanity known as *monomanie*. The actions, sensory experiences, and thought processes that the author attributes to Maldoror delineate his *monomane* characteristics and, consequently, define Maldoror’s own self-generated reality. Ducasse endows him with elements of various types of *monomanie*: Maldoror is certain of his own supreme power, though others may not fully appreciate it (*monomanie d’orgueil*); he responds to resistance or disagreement with a violence that echoes that of Nature itself (*monomanie furieuse*); he justifies any and all of his actions and praises himself fully (*monomanie Narcisse*); and he kills deliberately for the pleasure that it brings him (*monomanie homicide*). Ducasse crafted his narrative in such a way that the reader is sharing Maldoror’s thoughts and perceptions; the author essentially places his audience inside the universe defined by Maldoror’s *monomanie*, the universe of a character who has no boundaries but his own desires and whims. The reader’s uncertainty over the identity of the narrative focus and the problematic differentiation of protagonist, narrator, and author is part and parcel of

the author's goal of pushing boundaries and unsettling his reader with his vivid portrait of a delusional murderer.

Ducasse stages Maldoror's certainty of "genius" and consequent invented reality in a manner that marks him as a criminal *monomane*; the protagonist's actions and thought processes form and define a particular relationship between empirical reality, *monomanie*, and Maldoror's self-generated "genius." *Les Chants de Maldoror* is a particularly vibrant portrayal of the phenomenon represented by  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  which exploits the characteristics of an extreme and relatively obvious form of criminal *monomanie*; other late nineteenth-century authors, however, created in a more oblique fashion protagonists who represent the phenomenon of  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  and whom such authors endowed with elements of criminal *monomanie*. An example of such a protagonist is Thomas Edison in Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel *L'Eve future*. Maldoror and Edison both present examples of the self-generated reality of a *monomane* and their universes' irreconcilability with empirical reality, but Villiers is more indirect in his formulation and thus makes his protagonist better integrated into general society than is the case in *Maldoror*. Villiers crafts Edison as superficially reliable and authentic as a genius, at least at the beginning of the narrative; at their cores, however, their authors represent both Maldoror and Edison as criminal *monomanes* who inhabit the realities they themselves have conjured.

MAGICIAN, MASTERMIND, MONSTER – *L'ÈVE FUTURE*

il ne peut rien supporter qui tende à amoindrir sa personnalité, il n'aime  
que lui, se laisse aller à la vaine gloire, à l'ostentation, méprise le prochain;  
il est profondément égoïste, présomptueux, ambitieux et hypocrite ... Il

cherche les louanges et l'estime des autres, se fait une gloire de tout

(Lagardelle *De l'orgueil et de la folie* 11)

In this section I shall examine Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*, its construction, and how Villiers incorporated characteristics of criminal *monomanie* in his protagonist. I shall begin by examining how Villiers reinterpreted the historical figure of Thomas A. Edison in terms of the popular conception of the inventor rather than the real man himself and why the author did so. I shall then analyze the characteristics that the author incorporated into his protagonist that reflect the elements of criminal *monomanie* (particularly *monomanie d'orgueil* and *monomanie Narcisse*); at the same time, I shall also explore how Villiers' Edison exemplifies the phenomenon of self-generated reality in conflict with empirical reality.

Lagardelle's description of a *monomane d'orgueil* is certainly applicable to Ducasse's portrayal of his protagonist Maldoror, but it is equally applicable to Villiers' Edison. In *L'Ève future*, Villiers presents his readers with another protagonist obsessed with himself and his personal universe, a character both more discreet in his *monomanie* and based in part on a living celebrity: the American inventor Thomas Alva Edison. Villiers makes it clear in the note to his readers that precedes the actual narrative that his protagonist does not represent the real, living Thomas A. Edison<sup>41</sup>, but the popular image of Edison – the “Wizard of Menlo Park,” as the U.S. press termed him in hyperbolic paeans<sup>42</sup>. Villiers makes his main character an fetishized T.A. Edison because he

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<sup>41</sup> Hereafter, I use “T.A. Edison” to refer the historical figure as opposed to Villiers' protagonist.

<sup>42</sup> This is particularly in the late 1870s and the 1880s; see, for example, the *Chicago Tribune* in 1878 "Ears for the Deaf: What the Wizard of Menlo Park Will Do Next " *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 10 1878, p. 7. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, August 11, 2019., the *New York Herald* in 1879 "Edison's Eureka - The Electric Light at Last." *New York Herald*, December 21 1879, p. 8. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, August 11, 2019., the *Indianapolis Journal* in 1884 "The Wizard

(Villiers) portrays this inventor as a *monomane* self-proclaimed “genius” with an idiosyncratic, even warped view of the universe and his place in it.

How did this author mold the legend of an empirically real celebrity into a representative of criminal *monomanie*? Whereas Ducasse directly immersed his reader in his protagonist’s self-generated reality with first-person narration and ambiguity over the possible identity between author, narrator, and protagonist, Villiers used a more traditional narrative approach; *L’Ève future* has an undramatized third-person center of consciousness narration with long monologues by Edison that serve as intervals of self-revelatory first-person narration embedded within the larger third-person context. As is frequent in third-person center of consciousness narratives, the extent of the identity between author and narrative focus is unclear and is more properly considered as the possible identity between the authorial persona and the narrative focus. The emphatic, laudatory language and hyperbolic style that the narrative focus uses about Edison is very similar to the style and diction of the approving press stories that helped create T.A. Edison’s legend, and thus is more likely to connect to a persona than Villiers’ own voice.

In distinguishing his protagonist from the real T.A. Edison. Villiers is careful to use different terms to refer to the historical Edison and the Edison of legend: the historical Edison is “un très illustre inventeur americain” and “M. l’ingénieur Edison, notre

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of Menlo Park." *The Indianapolis journal*, June 7 1884. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, August 11, 2019., and the *New York Times* in 1887 "Edison's greatest: What the Wizard of Menlo Park has done for the world and wherein his greatest achievement lies." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, December 5 1887. August 11, 2019.. During the 1880s, the French press at times used the translation “Le sorcier de Menlo-Park,” e.g. *Le XIXe siècle* in 1880 "La nouvelle découverte de M. Edison." *Le XIXe siècle*, January 9 1880, p. 3. Gallica, August 11, 2019., *L’Univers illustré* in 1881 Bourgeat, F. "Le Laboratoire de M. Edison à Menlo-Park." *L’Univers Illustré*, January 22, 1881 1881, p. 55. Gallica, August 11, 2019., and *Le Petit Parisien* in 1889 "La Routine et la Science." *Le Petit Parisien*, August 18 1889, p. 1. Gallica, August 11, 2019..

contemporain,” whereas the fictional Edison is a “personnage” – a character – who bears numerous “fantastiques surnoms,” including “le Magicien du Siècle” and the aforementioned “Sorcier de Menlo Park” (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 37). Because of this warning, the reader knows that there the Edison of *L'Ève future* and the Edison of “empirical reality” are distinct; as Villiers explains, “Il me paraît de toute convenance de prévenir une confusion possible relativement au principal héros de ce livre” (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 37); with the term “principal héros,” the author emphasizes the magnitude of Edison’s role. To separate for his audience the magical wheat from the empirical chaff, Villiers contrasts the two Edisons; he does so in a way that implicitly tells the reader that the facts he believes knows about T.A. Edison from the popular press and other public descriptions do not apply to the character of Edison in the novel. He states that

l’Edison du présent ouvrage, son caractère, son habitation, son langage et ses théories sont – et devait être au moins passiblement distincts de la réalité ... en un mot le héros de ce livre est, avant tout, le “sorcier de Menlo Park”, etc. – et non M. l’ingénieur Edison, notre contemporain” (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 37)

The legend of Edison is unabashedly admiring, crediting Edison with genius, generosity, and a simple desire to improve mankind’s lot. Villiers, then, created an Edison with superficial traits in congruence with heroic image of the legend as well as hidden aspects beneath the surface that function as signs of *monomanie* and elements of self-generated reality in his protagonist.

When Villiers makes this explicit distinction, he introduces an initial philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{"Sorcerer of Menlo Park"}}{\text{"real" T.A. Edison}}$  (parallel to the later pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ). Indeed, the

reader will later see that the fictional Edison has criminal qualities. If we put Villiers' comparison from the "Avis au lecteur" in table form, it resembles the following:

<i>Fictional Edison</i> <i>(Sorcerer of Menlo Park) – term 1</i>	<i>"Empirical" T.A. Edison</i> <i>term 2</i>
"héros de ce livre" "l'Edison du présent ouvrage" Subject of "une légende"	"notre contemporain"
"le Magicien du siècle" "le Sorcier de Menlo Park" "le Papa du Phonographe"	"un très illustre inventeur américain" "M. l'ingénieur Edison" "ce grand citoyen des États-Unis"
"au moins passablement distinct de la réalité"	

Thus, Villiers claims explicitly not only that his Edison is distinct from the T.A. Edison of "empirical reality," but moreover that this fictional version is in some fashion even more exceptional than the actual person. I will need to substantiate my claim that Edison as a protagonist is a genius in his own mind rather than in the seeming reality of the novel's world. It is typical of a *monomane d'orgueil*'s "genius" to believe he can repeat Pygmalion's miraculous creation of an artificial woman and her transformation from an inanimate object to a companion. Unlike Pygmalion, however, Edison does not propose to give actual life to his inanimate creation, but rather to substitute an object with a simulacrum of life for a human being who is actually alive.

In the first chapter of the novel proper, Villiers introduces his readers to contradictory clues to Edison's personality and morality; the author presents the narrative persona's vivid descriptions of Edison and his setting at the same time as he implies that these descriptions mirror how Edison presents himself to the world. In the opening

paragraph, the author sets the scene: Edison's residence in Menlo Park. The details that Villiers has his narrative persona provide echo specifics from the popular press; for example, the author and popular biographical pieces mention a residence and laboratory bristling with incandescent lights and electrical wires and they both allude to a huge array of mysterious equipment, abstruse machines, and unfathomable chemical substances (Bourgeat 55; Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 39-40). The parallels between such elements reinforce Villiers' statement that his protagonist is the "Sorcier de Menlo-Park," the Edison of the public's imagination. At the same time, the details that Villiers includes and the phrasing with which he has his narrative persona present them imply a certain level of self-promotion or self-aggrandizement in the character of Edison. In the beginning sentence, we are told that Edison's estate is "au centre d'un réseau de fils électriques" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 39). The narrative persona's metaphor suggests that Edison is an individual at the center of events and progress; it also suggests that Edison, like a spider, controls a web of his own creation in which others may become trapped. Similarly, the narrative persona's declaration that Edison's home "C'est le n° 1 de la cité de Menlo Park" is both statement of Edison's preeminence and a hint at arrogance on the part of Edison; there is an implication that the protagonist is the center – or creator – of an entire "cité" around his home. Moreover, having an estate that is "le n° 1" of Menlo Park makes Edison, like the emperor Augustus, automatically the First Citizen.

Somewhat later in the chapter, Villiers moves from describing Edison's *milieu* to a portrayal of Edison himself; this portrait of the protagonist hints even more clearly at Edison's hidden *monomanie*: "l'ingénieur avait donné congé à ces cinq acolytes, ses chefs d'ateliers, - ouvriers dévoués, érudits et habiles qu'il rétribue en prince et dont le

silence lui est acquis (40).” Once again, the description that Villiers places in his narrative focus’ mouth displays multivocality. The narrative persona is, evidently, the one who characterizes Edison’s employees as “acolytes” and “dévoués” and who declares that Edison controls the workers’ discretion. Nevertheless, the word choice and phrasing imply that Edison has no reservations about the suitability of employees who behave with a kind of devotion that one could characterize in religious terms. Edison also apparently pays them in a “princely” manner, like a member of a royal family dispensing largesse to his favorites, and demands the absolute loyalty characteristic of the minions of a monarch (or perhaps of a deity). As a minor detail, Villiers dresses Edison in what a reader can only consider a grandiose garment: an “ample vêtement, légendaire déjà, de soie noire aux glands violâtres” (40). Between the silk cloth and the purple tassels, this jacket typifies ostentation, both of wealth and of personality.

Chapter II reveals Edison’s self-contradictory nature, to a certain extent echoing *Maldoror*. Villiers undermines his protagonist in ways subtly different from those Ducasse used, however. Villiers’ main character alternately claims and denies his uniqueness and superiority, and the narrative persona’s comments seem at this point more exculpatory than laudatory. The narrator quotes Edison as claiming that “il n’invente ... que comme la blé pousse” (41); the protagonist is portraying himself as a force of nature, something beyond the capacity of the rest of humanity in his brilliance and creativity. At the same time, the narrative persona insists that as a self-proclaimed “Humanitarian,” “il tire plus de fierté de ses labeurs que de son génie.” (42); the sentence implies that Edison is well aware that he is extraordinary. To hint that Edison is not completely mentally stable, Villiers supplies his narrative persona with words that have psychological



associations; for example, in his characterization of Edison, the narrative persona states that “Sa manie favorite consiste à se croire un IGNORANT, par une sorte de fatuité légitime” (punctuation in original) [*ibid*]. The term *manie* denotes a type of insanity whose sufferers exhibit “un délire général avec agitation ... Il donne lieu à des émotions bizarres, gaies ou tristes, extravagantes ou furieuses”<sup>43</sup>, or by a simpler definition “Fantaisie, goût portée à l’extrême”<sup>44</sup>. The term *manie* evokes ideas of excessiveness and delusion, and by associating these concepts with Edison, even implicitly, Villiers continues to lay a foundation for an element of insanity in the character of his protagonist. The chapter ends with another hint that Edison is somewhat unbalanced: “... il s’abandonnait même, par délassement, à toutes sortes de réflexions fantaisistes et bizarres” (Villiers de L’Isle-Adam 42). Once more, Villiers associates Edison with fantasy and bizarrerie; according to the narrative persona, Edison has a habit of relaxing by indulging “reflections” that exhibit qualities reminiscent of hallucinations. With these implications of madness, Villiers has introduced the basic philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; as the novel progresses, this pair intensifies and expands to incorporate the element of criminal *monomanie*. This deepening and growth begins in the next chapter with Edison’s dramatic, self-revelatory soliloquy.

Villiers gives a definite edge of Mad Scientist to what the chapter title calls “Les lamentations d’Edison,” a monologue written with dramatic dashes, ellipses, rhetorical questions and specifics tangential to the main threads of his discourse. The main theme

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<sup>43</sup> Bouillet, Marie-Nicolas. *Dictionnaire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts*. Neuvième édition revue et corrigée. édition, Hachette, 1869.

<sup>44</sup> Larousse, Pierre. *Nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française*. 43e édition édition, A. Boyer et Cie, 1878, *ibid*.

of Edison's monologue is the tragedy of his extremely late appearance on the scene of "l'Humanité:" had he existed thousands of years ago, he would have revolutionized existence with his phonograph. No one else could, though; as with all Mad Scientists with delusions of grandeur, everyone else mocked him and scorned him in their dense ignorance and stupidity:

Et penser qu'après six mille et *quelques* années d'une lacune aussi préjudiciable que celle de mon Phonographe, reprit-il, quantité de lazzi, émanés de l'indifférence humaine, on salué l'apparition de mon premier essai !... "Jouet d'enfant !" grommelait la foule. (45; punctuation in original)

Villiers chooses to have his protagonist characterize all of earlier recorded history as inferior because the lack of a phonograph, and any criticism or dismissiveness of his invention as stemming from "indifference," i.e., lack of respect for the improvement of humanity. His conception of his own creativity is arrogant to the point of delusions of grandeur; with such statements, the author builds *monomanie* into his protagonist.

In a Book III, chapter 8, Villiers gives another view of Edison's grandiosity and self-obsession, this time through a description by the narrative persona of an unfavorable characterization of the protagonist in "la presse européenne":

La presse européenne a spécifié de quelle nature sont quelquefois ses expériences. Il ne se soucie que du but grandiose; les détails ne méritent à ses yeux que le regard dont un philosophe honore toujours trop de pures contingences. (57)

In fact, this description reflects a current of thought about the real Edison in France in the 1880s that claimed that T.A. Edison was self-promoting and grandiose, an engineer and mechanic rather than a scientist. In 1881, the Comte de Moncel<sup>45</sup> wrote a letter to the Paris periodical *XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* in which he critiqued T.A. Edison in terms very similar to those in Villiers' text; Moncel writes of the electric light that

ce système n'a absolument rien de nouveau ...ce qui m'étonne, c'est que  
... on se laisse encore prendre aux dires des reporters de M. Edison, et  
surtout que l'on regarde comme un oracle. M. Edison est, il est vrai, un  
inventeur très ingénieux et très féconde, mais rien de plus ("Nouvelle  
découverte" 3)

Such a critical opinion of Edison's work is, almost by definition, anathema to his legend; thus, when Villiers has his narrative persona refer to disapproving opinions in the European press, he is suggesting negative qualities in his legendary Edison that are already associated with the real T.A. Edison. T.A. Edison's fixation on his public image and the purported unoriginality of his work provides Villiers with yet another method for extending the foundation of sub-rosa indicators of *monomanie d'orgueil* in his legendary Edison. In this (and similar) passages, Villiers uses grandiose diction and dramatic punctuation on the part of his protagonist to pursue the theme of Edison's self-image as wronged *monomane* genius while subtly conveying that this image is not, in fact, a reflection of reality but rather a manifestation of the protagonist's self-generated reality. The initial capital of "Phonographe," for example, that Villiers has Edison use in his monologue suggests the all-encompassing importance of his creations in his own

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<sup>45</sup> Théodore de Moncel, a noted physicist and expert on electricity and its applications

mind<sup>46</sup> while the apostrophe and ellipses in Edison's musings heighten his melodramatic tone. The reader sees these linguistic quirks and *monomaniaque* theme repeatedly throughout the rest of the novel.

Other characters do appear, acting as foils for the inventor or as sources of leading statements that allow him to expand upon his favorite subjects: himself, his scientific philosophy, and his brilliant works. Villiers gives Edison both major and minor interlocutors, though a character's status in this regard may evolve over the course of the novel; certain individuals begin as unseen voices (Mrs. Anderson) or as characters in someone else's story (Miss Alicia), but eventually appear bodily at a later point in the narrative. One character, however, plays the role of Edison's primary interlocutor, follower and dupe right from his appearance in chapter 7: Lord Ewald. In an echo of *Maldoror*, Villiers too gives his genius a young English associate; Ewald is "le noble ami" and "cet admirable adolescent" (54) in Edison's words. It is likely that the author is portraying Ewald as a young adult who is immature and jejune enough to seem an adolescent, but it is also possible that Villiers is not merely echoing Ducasse but making a specific reference *Maldoror* and its criminal "petit roman."

It is Ewald who gives Edison the excuse the inventor needs in order to show the world just how brilliant he is. In *L'Ève future*, however, the Englishman is both a victim and, to a certain extent, an accomplice. The actual victim(s) are women; Edison is, among other things, a misogynist. In fact, Edison seems to be terribly contemptuous of

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<sup>46</sup> This initial capital is not typical for contemporary French works about T.A. Edison, even in flattering profiles; Giffard's 1878 work devoted to the phonograph as a product of Edison's genius, for example, does not use an initial capital for "phonographe" unless the word begins a sentence Giffard, Pierre. *Le phonographe expliqué à tout le monde: Edison et ses inventions*. 8e edition, M. Dreyfous, 1878. *Petite bibliothèque à 1 franc*.

women, at least in part because he feels that they are incapable of appreciating his genius. As such, their value lies strictly in their pliant utility to men, their decorative qualities (e.g., beauty and youth), and their essentially moronic spirituality. He describes to Lord Ewald how his artificial woman is infinitely superior to the real one she will replace:

Miss Alicia Clary vous apparaîtra, non seulement transfigurée, ... non seulement d'une élévation d'esprit des plus augustes, mais revêtue d'une sorte d'immortalité. – Enfin, cette sottise éblouissante sera non plus une femme, mais un ange: non plus une maîtresse, mais une amante; non plus la Réalité, mais l'IDEAL. (108)

According to Villiers' legendary Edison, an artificial woman is spiritually superior to a flesh and blood woman, but physically superior as well. Since the former is not actually alive, she cannot die; she will last as long as her component parts continue to be intact and functioning. In another suggestion of self-promoting disingenuousness on his protagonist's part, Villiers has Edison gloss over the significant point that the artificial woman is not truly immortal but has an existence limited by the functionality of her mechanical and chemical elements. Despite this flaw in Edison's argument, Villiers has him continue his hyperbolic comparison of artificial versus living. The summation of Edison's comparison is telling; artificial is the ideal, living is reality. This statement is essentially the same notion as the one expressed by the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{reality}}$ .

Villiers shapes Edison's descriptions (here and throughout) of the perfection of his own creation, as well as his contemptuous dismissal of the humanity and value of the women to be replaced. The arrogant content and tone of these descriptions, along with their implication that Edison prefers his own conception of reality to empirical reality,

further the suggestion underlying criminal *monomanie* in the character of Edison. One of the narrative's earliest examples of this (in Ch. 8) is woman's arm, seemingly amputated, displayed in Edison's living room. This "objet de songe" as the chapter title describes it, seems almost still alive or at least very recently amputated:

C'était un bras humain posé sur un coussin de soie violâtre ... C'était le bras et la main gauche d'une jeune femme ... le derme si pur et si satiné que l'aspect en était aussi cruel que fantastique ... ce doux et gracieux spécimen d'un corps juvénile (56)

An isolated – and prominently displayed – amputated arm, no matter how beautiful, has unquestionable criminal overtones. Though the narrative persona uses admiring language such as "pure," "satiny," "soft," and "graceful" in his description of the arm, he notes as well that "Une pensée glaçante se fût éveillée à cette vue dans l'esprit d'un étranger" (56). The reader soon learns that the arm is not in fact real, but rather an artificial creation. Given that this artificial arm is on display in Edison's salon, like an *objet d'art* no less, it follows that he considers it yet another magnificent example of his genius, yet another demonstration of his near-godlike powers of creation.

The delightful – and artificial – amputated arm suggests to the reader both Edison's self-obsession and his status as a *monomane* creating his own reality. This impression grows exponentially once Villiers introduces the English "youth," Count Ewald. Ewald is, in a more sentimental way, almost as misogynistic as Edison; we know this because the irremediable "problem" that the Lord confesses woefully to the inventor is essentially a diatribe against the female sex in the person of the beautiful singer Miss Alicia Clary. Just as Villiers has the "Sorcier de Menlo-Park" continually reveal his idealization of

mindless beautiful women, he attributes admiration for superficial attractiveness in women to Ewald. The young lord extols Miss Alicia's beauty, claiming that "cette femme, aux yeux de l'artiste le plus désintéressé, serait d'une beauté non seulement incontestable mais tout à fait extraordinaire." (75). Overwhelmingly, however, Villiers has Ewald promote empty beauty by complaining about Miss Alicia's morality, personality, thoughts, lack of spirituality, words and actions. In short, he denounces everything about his "mistress" except for her physical appearance and the melodic quality of her voice. Ewald even notes that "Lorsque Alicia cessait de parler, son visage, ne recevant plus l'ombre que projetaient sur lui ses plates et déshonnêtes paroles, son marbre, resté divin, démentait le langage évanoui" (85). Several prolix pages later, the young milord continues in the same vein, but even more brazenly condemnatory of female thought: "Le seul malheur dont soit frappée Miss Alicia, c'est la pensée! -- Si elle était privée de toute pensée, je pourrais la comprendre. La *Venus* de marbre, en effet, n'a que faire de la Pensée" (93). This last sentence is a bit opaque, but when we read further we discover Ewald's opinion that such a statue has nothing to do with thought. In attributing this opinion to the Englishman, Villiers alludes to both the legend of Pygmalion and Edison's misogyny; the author, however, combines these two in a subtle and ironic fashion. Like Pygmalion, Ewald's perfect woman is a statue, but unlike Pygmalion the milord would prefer that a flesh and blood woman take on the qualities of the statue rather than the reverse; in this, Villiers demonstrates that Ewald's views reflect Edison's. Ewald's explication of the relationship between a marble woman and thought continues "... Il sort de son aspect ce Verbe-ci: 'Moi, je suis *seulement* la Beauté même. Je ne pense que par l'esprit de qui me contemple'" (93). It is evident that the Englishman

is disappointed that Miss Alicia thinks at all. A statue leaves thinking to her viewer, i.e., Ewald and possibly Edison as well.

Given that Villiers establishes this congruence of misogyny between Ewald and Edison, it is hardly surprising that the Englishman provides the perfect opening for Edison to indulge his destructive *monomanie* in the form of an implicitly criminal “solution” to Ewald’s overwhelming distress. In the clutches of his misery, Ewald exclaims “Ah! qui m’ôtera cette âme de ce corps!” (98). Though this statement does not specifically suggest murder, it does imply some sort of death as one can hardly live with the soul and body separated. Edison is, however, equal to the task. Villiers has him prolong the suspense that Ewald feels while awaiting Edison’s explanation of a perfect, life-saving “solution” by deploying a facile rhetorical device: a tortured (and repetitive) medical metaphor that echoes the labored nature of the analogies in *Maldoror*:

Mon cher lord, vous êtes un de ces malades que l’on ne peut traiter que par le poison: je me résous donc, toutes remontrances épuisées, à vous médicamenter, s’il vous plaît, d’une façon terrible ... Le remède consiste à *réaliser vos vœux!* ... Allons, je le vois! je dois tenter de vous sauver l’être. Et, comme il est des blessures que l’on ne peut guérir qu’en empirant leur profondeur, *je veux accomplir votre rêve tout entier!* (106, punctuation original)

As Villiers’ original italics suggest, the truly important aspect of the Electrician’s “solution” is his ability to create new reality; the author’s Edison thinks he can shape the world to accommodate Ewald’s desires. He next confirms this interpretation to both the reader and Ewald with the air of either a conjuror or a god, producing a somewhat coy



definition of Ewald's "desire" – though Ewald, alas, at this moment plays only the role of uncomprehending interlocutor :

—Milord Ewald, ne vous êtes-vous pas écrié, tout à l'heure, en parlant

d'*Elle* : "Qui m'ôtera cette âme de ce corps?"

-- Oui, murmura Lord Ewald, un peu interdit.

– Eh bien ! C'EST MOI. (106)

Edison's rhetorical excess invokes a Mad Scientist sound track. In repeating Ewald's morally dubious plaint ("Qui m'ôtera cette âme de ce corps?"), Edison not only makes an indirect reference to his near-supernatural powers (could he be the divine figure who can accomplish such a miraculous feat?) but also confirms his willingness, even eagerness, to perform what can only be described as a fearfully destructive human experiment.

This scene evokes the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality (genius)}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; the incongruity inherent in this pair applies to the manipulation of the empirical world according to the psychological attributes that the author deploys in the character of Edison. Once again Villiers shapes Edison's *monomanie d'orgueil* by having the protagonist vaunt his own self-proclaimed genius and powers of creation; Villiers suggests that such a *monomane* creates a reality preferable to the universe that exists independent of his brilliant thoughts. Once the author reveals Edison's plan to replace Miss Alicia with his "Andréide" (the artificial woman) to the reader, we can see more clearly the amorality that suggests criminal *monomanie* in the inventor; Villiers ends Book I with a declaration by Edison's "sur un ton d'une solennité brusque et grave, – n'oubliez pas qu'en accomplissant votre ténébreux souhait, je ne cède... qu'à la Nécessité" (106, punctuation original). Villiers

crafts Edison's tone with an air of arrogant pomposity typical of a *monomane Narcisse*; in addition, the author places phrases in his protagonist's mouth that suggest that his replacement of empirical reality with self-generated reality is altruistic and not a function of *monomanie d'orgueil* or *monomanie Narcisse*, i.e. self-obsession. Villiers implies several different justifications on Edison's part for his objectively amoral and disturbing plans: they are purely for Ewald's benefit, not his own, he is the only individual who can perform this transformation and thus is Ewald's only hope, and he is driven not by his ego in satisfying the Englishman's desires but by "Necessity." Villiers leaves Edison's personal conception of "Necessity" ill-defined, which reinforces his theme of self-generated reality and the difficulties an outside observer experiences in interpreting a *monomane*'s thought processes. The author uses Books II through V to elaborate on Edison's superhuman creativity, motivation, and purported genius while at the same time to induce in the reader an agony of expectation awaiting the culmination of Edison (and Ewald)'s crime.

Book II and Book III introduce Ewald and the audience to "Hadaly," the mindless artificial woman whom Edison has been mentioning to for several chapters. As one might expect from Edison's earlier exaltations of women who are beautiful blank slates, this perfect "woman" is nearly identical to a mobile version of Ewald's *Venus*, notable only in her meaningless loveliness:

Debout en ce dais, une sorte d'*Être*, dont l'aspect dégageait une  
impression d'*inconnu*, apparaissait... Une féminine armure, en feuilles  
d'argent brûlé... accusait, moulée avec mille nuances parfaites, de sveltes  
et virginales formes... Après un instant d'immobilité, cet être mystérieux

descendit l'unique marche de son seuil et s'avança, dans son inquiétante  
beauté. (114, punctuation original)

In this description, Villiers' narrative persona incorporates into Hadaly's description a variety of characteristics that Edison the misogynist finds admirable; certain characteristics reinforce the dichotomy of  $\frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{reality}}$  as well. In the context of the incongruous relationship represented by this philosophical pair, the narrative persona's assertion that Hadaly is a "being" who evokes the "unknown" is a clear indicator by Villiers of the vital nature of appearance in the protagonist's idea of a perfect female. The narrative persona, in his devotion to the fantastic "legend" of Edison, avoids referring to the protagonist's creation, Hadaly, as a machine, or indeed as any sort of simulacrum; the persona's credulous and complimentary bias shows in his ambiguous characterization of Hadaly as a mysterious form of life rather than a synthetic creation. This feeling of admiration persists in the narrative persona's description of Hadaly's attributes, though these clearly indicate that she is an artificial construction. According to this description, despite Hadaly's artificial nature, she possesses some of the most admirable qualities of femininity.

The narrative persona's description of Hadaly closely echoes Ewald's earlier elegaic description of Miss Alicia's appearance without any indication of her character, intelligence, or personality:

Miss Alicia ... est svelte comme le tremble argenté. ... -- son corps offre  
un ensemble de lignes à surprendre les plus grands statuaires. Une chaude  
paleur de tubéreuse en revêt les plénitudes. C'est, en vérité, la splendeur  
de la *Venus victrix* humanisée. (75)

Though Miss Alicia is not an artificial creation like Hadaly, she already possesses some of the same physical characteristics of the perfect, artificial woman: both Alicia and Hadaly are slight and graceful, with bodies associated with a precious metal. Miss Alicia's flaws are not in her appearance, which echoes that of a statue, but in the intangible qualities of her mind and spirit. The similarities between the outward physical form of the female automaton and that of the living woman suggest that Miss Alicia would be an excellent subject for Edison's experiment in replacing the physical with the artificial. The difficulty of differentiating between the real and the artificial is a tendency that continues throughout the characterization of Hadaly. Villiers describes (albeit without explicit attribution) Lord Ewald's perception of Edison's "Andréide" :

la lumineuse et transparente image d'une jeune femme, -- statue charnelle  
de la *Venus victrix*, en effet, s'il en palpita jamais une sur cette terre  
d'illusion. (116)

Both female figures are called "living" statues of Venus; this last is Ewald's deepest desire, and only Edison can fulfill it in his near-divine role of Creator. Villiers also takes the opportunity to provide the protagonist with another grandiose monologue, this time including not only Edison's typical bombast, but other reminders of the engineer's *monomane* nature and his influence on Ewald<sup>47</sup>. First, he has Edison display the amputated-arm-on-a-pillow with a wildly melodramatic flourish to the now stunned – yet fascinated – milord:

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<sup>47</sup> Here, we recall the relationship between Maldoror and Mervyn. In both cases, the criminal *monomane* dominates a naive young man who then turns to these figures of genius for answers to his problems.

“Voulez-vous me dire quelle impression produit sur vous ce spectacle-ci ?”, demanda-t-il [Edison] en montrant le pâle et sanglant bras féminin posé sur le coussin de soie violâtre. ... Le jeune homme souleva d’abord la main.

“Que signifie cela ? continua-t-il Comment ! cette main... mais elle est tiède, encore !

-- Ne trouvez-vous donc rien de plus *extraordinaire* dans ce bras ?” ...

L’Anglais semblait comme fasciné; il avait pris le bras et comparait avec sa propre main ...

“... -- N’est-ce pas, en vérité, de la chair que je touche en ce moment ?»

(118, punctuation other than ellipses in original)

Until Edison announces Hadaly’s true artificial nature to Lord Ewald in Book II, chapter 4, Ewald was under the impression that this creature was flesh and blood; even after seeing the isolated arm the young lord remains somewhat confused. The lifelike temperature and texture of the artificial arm puzzle and intrigue Ewald; he now knows the limb to be artificial but has great difficulty internalizing this knowledge. Obviously, the arm is just as disconcerting to the reader as it had been all along, yet Ewald shows no more humanitarian concern upon looking at what he believes is a flesh-and-blood arm than he would if it were truly detached from a marble statue. Edison glories in the sight of the arm, and he appears to have infected Ewald with his self-generated conception of reality.

Edison then bestows upon the now mesmerized Lord Ewald a dubious yet colorful explication of the pseudo-science behind Hadaly’s creation, adding several unconvincing

details along the way. Chapter four of Book II is particularly rich in confused logic and false science; it has a title that is a prompt for the reader regarding detailed explanations: “Préliminaires d’un prodige.” The word *Préliminaires* already informs the reader that he or she will not get a full explanation from Edison yet. The word *prodige* has several possible meanings relevant to this passage; it can refer to a surprising and extraordinary feat or achievement, or it can refer to person who is exceptional in his field of expertise<sup>48</sup>. The whole title of the chapter, then, can have several meanings to the reader; the audience can consider the title as meaning either an introduction to a work of “genius,” or an introductory statement by a “genius.” Both interpretations hint at the same context: a preliminary statement by Edison concerning his work, i.e., the *Andréide*. The pseudo-science of Edison’s teasing “preliminaries” draws us irresistibly back to the general philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality (genius)}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  so characteristic of *monomanie*. Edison’s so-called science is incompatible with empirical science; it is unquestionably an instance of self-generated reality. A foreshadowing of the pseudo-scientific technical detail in Book V occurs when the protagonist purports to answer the question of how he has caused the amputated artificial arm to display the characteristics of true flesh: “une moelle galvanique en communion constante avec un réseau des fils d’induction enchevêtrés à la manière des nerfs et des veines” [a galvanic marrow in constant commune with a network of inductive filaments tangled in the manner of nerves and veins] (Villiers de L’Isle-Adam 119). Such a sentence carries the patina of science,

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<sup>48</sup> referring to a characteristic of an object or achievement: “Effet surprenant arrivé contre le cours ordinaire de la nature ;” referring to a person : “courage extraordinaire : prodiges de valeur; personne ... qui excelle dans son genre” Larousse, Pierre. *Nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française*. 43e édition édition, A. Boyer et Cie, 1878.

sharing some elements with the contemporary definition of the scientific term “galvanisme:” “Moyen de développer de l'**électricité** dans les substances animales, en faisant **communiquer** entre eux les muscles et les nerfs au moyen de **conducteurs métalliques**” ( , 282; emphasis mine). Even so, Edison’s supposedly scientific definition is impossible to imagine either in form or function. On the pseudo-arm’s flesh,

-- Oh! c’est mieux! – dit simplement Edison. ... ceci est un composé de substances exquis, élaborées par la chimie ... C’est de la *chair artificielle*, et je puis vous expliquer comment on la produit ; du reste, lisez Berthelot.

(Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 118-119)

The phrase “substances esquises” is mysterious, uninformative, and useless for understanding Edison’s “scientific” methodology, but any educated reader would instantly wonder what precisely is artificial flesh, and how it might connect with the famous synthetic chemist Berthelot<sup>49</sup>. Raitt agrees that this will confuse the audience; as he says in a footnote to Villier’s text, “Berthelot n’a jamais prétendu créer de la ‘chair artificielle’” (Raitt, 408). Villiers reinforces his characterization of Edison as a *monomane* through the protagonist’s claim of being the only person who can succeed in producing artificial flesh: “je crois être le seul qui puisse en fabriquer d’aussi perfectionnée!... ” (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 119); such arrogance is quintessentially part of the discourse of *monomanie d’orgueil* and *monomanie Narcisse*.

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<sup>49</sup> This was well before polymers and plastics. Berthelot never claimed to produce “artificial flesh;” he was famous for his work on techniques of organic synthesis (e.g., synthesis of acetylene, of fatty acids) *Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle: répertoire universel des sciences des lettres et des arts, avec la biographie et de nombreuses gravures*. 3e édition édition, vol. 5, au bureau de l'Encyclopédie, 1870..

Edison continues in this *monomaniaque* fashion to declare himself the superior of every inventor who ever attempted to create an automaton. He specifically mentions Albert the Great, whose automaton was condemned by Aquinas, according to legend; Vaucanson, creator of several automaton musicians and an excreting mechanical duck; Maelzel, another lover of automated musicians, and an almost certainly imaginary individual named Horner (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam N 3, 409). Hence, Villiers represents Edison as insisting fiercely on his superiority to a theologically condemned savant, several would-be musicians, and a completely mythical artificer; the curious weakness of the savant's argument is reflected – with an extra dash of opaque *monomanie Narcisse* – in Edison's expansion upon how modern technology (i.e., his own) is superior to anything that came before:

Il nous est permis de REALISER, désormais, de puissants fantômes, de mystérieux *présences-mixtes* dont les devanciers d'eussent même jamais tenté l'idée, dont le seul énoncé les eût fait sourire douloureusement et crier à l'impossible!

(121, punctuation original)

Villiers has Edison explain to his interlocutor that his achievements surpass the level of mere technology and extend into penetrating the secrets of the paranormal that all scientists had heretofore considered impossible. Edison's discourse in this passage is the product of irrational, spurious logic but consistent with the wild-eyed hyperbolic assertions of a criminally *monomane* individual.



Even the the protagonist's language reflects his *monomaniaque* nature; the psychologist Henri Dagonet characterized the language of "la mégalomanie" (i.e. *monomanie d'orgueil* in combination with *monomanie Narcisse*):

La manière de parler, d'écrire, peut dénoter la nature des aberrations, le caractère du délire; les malades aiment les phrases sonores, les tournures hardies, les antithèses; leur style est imagé, fleurie, symbolique; souvent il est ... impératif. (Dagonet 268)

Edison's language, as Villiers crafts it, is unquestionably florid, full of rotund phrases, and emphatic; these characteristics of the protagonist's statements harmonize extremely well with Dagonet's model of *mégolomanie*. Dagonet based his model on an extensive array of case studies, and given his large sample size, Villiers' legendary Edison is not, as he would have the world believe, exceptional. As I mentioned earlier in this section, the author's mythologized Edison (like the general model articulated by Dagonet) is addicted to excessive rhetorical flourishes. In addition to the by now predictable small capitals and italics, Villiers has his protagonist return as well to serial interjections and stage asides. In a dramatic rejection of Ewald's misapprehension that Hadaly is the culmination of Edison's creative genius rather than simply a step along the way to his *magnum opus*, Villiers narrates

– Eh bien! Continua froidement Edison, tout ceci n'est rien encore! Non! Rien! (*mais ce qui s'appelle rien! Vous dis-je*) en comparaison de l'œuvre possible. – Ah ! l'OEuvre [*sic*] possible! Si vous saviez ! Si vous ..."  
Tout à coup, il s'arrêta, comme perdu en la fixité d'une idée soudaine – et si terrible qu'elle lui coupa net la parole. (122, punctuation in original)

The author shapes Edison's phrasing and diction in such a way that the protagonist combines the delusions of a typical *monomane d'orgueil* with the *lieux communs* of a frustrated sage. In Edison's outbursts, fraught references to an enigmatic "great work," intense fixations, and disproportionate hyper-emotional declarations, Villiers displays Edison's congruence with the commonly accepted symptoms of *monomanie d'orgueil* and *monomanie Narcisse* as seen in the contemporary popular psychological literature. In reference to the type of disorder we have just seen (and will continue to see) in Villiers' representation of the legendary Edison, Élie Nicoulau's 1886 *Essai sur la mégalomanie* concentrates on the type of disorder we have seen in Villiers' representation of Edison. When speaking with a *mégalo maniaque*, Nicoulau reports

Si vous voulez l'embarrasser par des objections, c'est avec une logique remarquable qu'il les écartera. Il systématise son délire avec une puissance de raisonnement faite pour étonner; de sorte que c'est avec justesse que Hoffbauer a pu dire des malades de cette catégorie: "Ils tirent de cette idée dominante des conclusions si logiquement, si rigoureusement déduites, que si le principe dont elles découlent était vrai, elles seraient la preuve d'une intelligence remarquable" (Nicoulau 18-19, punctuation in original)

Nicolau and Hoffbauer might have been describing Villier's Edison: a certain twisted self-referential logic permeates the pseudo-scientific explanations that Villiers puts in his protagonist's mouth. Edison's statements echo Nicolau's description of *mégalo manie*; Villiers has his protagonist base his pseudo-scientific explanations on fallacious premises that ultimately undermine the self-aggrandizing arguments that the author attributes to his protagonist. Edison boasts to Ewald

Je vais vous démontrer, mathématiquement et à l'instant même, comment, avec les formidables ressources actuelles de la Science, et ceci d'une manière glaçante peut-être, mais indubitable, comment je puis, dis-je, me saisir ... du reflet de son Identité, enfin (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 124, punctuation except ellipses in original )

To believe the protagonist's claims, the reader must accept that Edison is a master of all scientific and mathematical knowledge and that his achievements follow irresistibly from his irrefutable self-generated logic; it is not necessary for the reader to have extensive knowledge of physics, biology, or engineering to notice the suspiciously metaphysical and faintly contradictory nature of the statements Villiers assigns to Edison. This is just a taste of the pseudo-science to come, however; Villiers has Edison promise several times to reveal more precise details of Hadaly's construction

Tout à l'heure, si vous le désirez, je vous dévoilerai les arcanes de sa magique nature (117-118)

Si vous voulez savoir où sont disposés les éléments de ce réseau, comment ils s'alimentent pour ainsi dire d'eux-mêmes, ... je puis vous en faire l'anatomie ... (119-120).

Despite Edison's pledge to provide further engineering details, Ewald is as confused as the reader by what he has already seen and heard of Edison's "solution." He requires extra clarification, and not just of minutia; he demands of the protagonist "– Une dernière fois, soyez assez bon pour me répondre: où voulez-vous en venir?" (123). Villiers incorporates a lack of comprehension in the Englishman; he either does not

understand or is suspicious of Edison's claims, despite the protagonist's coy allusions to convincing details.

Edison's criminality emerges again in the answer Villiers formulates to Lord Ewald's plaintive question. Referring to Miss Alicia, Edison declares "Eh bien! puisque cette femme vous est si chère ... JE VAS LUI RAVIR SA PROPRE PRESENCE" (124, punctuation in original). Once again the protagonist does not say a word directly about homicide, but rather proposes an action that suggests death; Villiers has Edison assert that he will rip her intangible essence from her physical presence.<sup>50</sup> As before, when Edison claimed to be able to take Miss Alicia's soul from her body, he describes an obviously destructive action; in both cases, the protagonist sees nothing unsavory about a process that separates an individual's physical entity from her mental faculties and personality. Only after Lord Ewald has finally realized that Edison intends to replace the love of Ewald's life with a simulacrum – Hadaly – who has the same appearance can the "experiment" proceed. Thus, the supposed solution that Villiers creates is not just an answer to the desperate pleadings of a friend, or – no matter what Edison says later – a remedy to a problem haunting humanity, but an unscientific caricature of the empirical method as well; Villiers's narrative persona draws our attention to the discordant, largely unscientific nature of the project: "une partie était proposée, dont l'enjeu était, scientifiquement, un esprit" (127). The narrative persona undermines the protagonist's assertion of objective empiricism when he likens Edison's experiment to a wager with a spirit as the ultimate prize.

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<sup>50</sup> The 1878 edition of Larousse's French dictionary defines "présence" as "Existence d'une personne dans un lieu marqué. *Présence réel*, existence réelle du corps et du sang de Jésus-Christ dans l'Eucharistie" Larousse, Pierre. *Nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française*. 43e édition edition, A. Boyer et Cie, 1878.

Villiers gives his audience yet another indicator of Edison's morally ambiguous character when he dismisses Lord Ewald's concerns about the difficulty of convincing Miss Alicia to participate willingly in this pseudo-experiment:

[Ewald] Miss Alicia Clary ne consentirait jamais, d'ailleurs, à se prêter à cette expérience, et, en effet, j'hésiterais moi-même, désormais, je l'avoue, à l'y engager.

[Edison] -- Ceci fait partie du problème et me regarde. Et puis, l'*œuvre* serait incomplète, c'est-à-dire ABSURDE, si elle ne s'accomplissait pas à l'insu même de votre chère Miss Alicia. (128, punctuation in original)

There is some question here of what, exactly, Edison's *œuvre* is – is it an achievement of science? An empirical experiment? A wager? A form of salvation for Lord Ewald? A perfecting of feminine humanity? Is the *œuvre* Hadaly, or her use? No matter what the answer to this question, however, Edison shows a disturbing attitude toward the central individual concerned, Miss Alicia. If, however, one considers Miss Alicia purely in the role of a victim, and Edison in that of an aggressor, the Engineer's statements make complete sense. Obviously, any crime that involves fraud or suppression is *absurde* if the victim is aware of it; it simply will not work. Edison will, however, have his supposed experiment, no matter what the cost to anyone else. Ewald hesitates wavers briefly in his commitment to the “experiment” and ask Edison, his source of certainty, what to do.

Villiers crafts the protagonist's replies on two different levels; one is the literal meaning of his words, and the other is their perverse effect on Ewald:

Edison, à cette parole, regarda le jeune homme avec sa fixité habituelle qui, cette fois, s'aggravait évidemment de la secrète arrière-pensée qu'il ne voulait pas exprimer. ...

- Que choisiriez-vous?

- Placé dans cette alternative, je choisirais l'issue qui me semble la moins dangereuse— *quant à moi*. ...

Terrible, le grand électricien s'inclina devant Lord Ewald:

"Je me brûlerais la cervelle, dit-il." (136, punctuation except ellipses in original)

Villiers' narrative persona hints at this double level when he mentions the secret doubts that Edison resists expressing; since the protagonist's explicit advice is to not go through with Miss Alicia's replacement, Edison's hidden doubts would, rather, encourage Ewald to accept the experiment. The author makes Edison's replies to Ewald deliberately evasive, implying that he himself is ambiguous about substituting Hadaly for Miss Alicia; the protagonist's final, dramatic declaration that he would rather commit suicide than have to make the decision emphatically rings false after Villiers spent numerous chapters having Edison laud his own intelligence and his *oeuvre*. After Edison's final histrionic comment, Ewald decides to leave; it would seem that Villiers has the Englishman thus obliquely reject the experiment. The protagonist, however, ruthlessly points out that it is too late for Ewald to change Miss Alicia's fate: "Ah! Je vous dirai qu'il est un peu tard, reprit Edison. D'après vos premières paroles, *j'ai commencé*" (137). The time when Ewald could have disowned his desire for Miss Alicia's replacement seems to have passed, yet Edison had already enticed Miss Alicia to leave New York and travel to

Menlo Park before Ewald's crisis of conscience. The manner in which Villiers has Ewald fall into line behind Edison is again recalls the relationship between Maldoror and Mervyn and/or Aghone; the most forceful argument or objection that the young Englishman can come up with is an exceedingly feeble protest: "C'est que, dit Lord Ewald, je n'ai point d'appartement retenu dans Menlo Park pour cette nuit" (137). Ewald's weak excuse that he had not planned to stay and therefore did not have a residence in Menlo Park demonstrates the essential weakness that Villiers incorporated into the character. This quibble is easily overcome, and Ewald definitively joins Edison in his practical criminal enterprise: "Le pacte était conclu" (140).

In keeping with Edison's status as an engineer and (in life at least) a supreme technologist rather than scientist, he gives Lord Ewald a sort of oral owner's manual for the *Andréide*. With this surreal and subtly discordant discourse, Villiers can have his protagonist simultaneously reinforce his callousness and produce more examples of pseudo-scientific nonsense for Ewald. When Edison tells Ewald that for ocean voyages Hadaly travels in the hold of the ship, in a coffin of her very own that is also a "prison" for the artificial woman, his lack of empathy for his own creation is obvious:

l'Andréide possède, entre autre trésors, un lourd cercueil d'ébène ... Sur les portes refermées de cette prison est scellée une plaque d'argent où le nom de Hadaly est gravé ... Il sera surmonté de vos antiques armoiries, qui consacreront cette captivité ... Cette geôle de votre rêve sera prête dans trois semaines. (144)

Hadaly may not be alive, but the tone of Edison's explanation suggests that he wishes one could do the same with real women. In another set of specious technical

details regarding the construction and conduct of Hadaly, the protagonist purports to explain the Andréide's ability to speak. Villiers has Edison claim that his artificial woman can reproduce Miss Alicia's voice perfectly by means of an internal phonograph:

l'accent, le timbre et les intonations, à des millionnièmes de vibrations près, seront inscrits sur les feuilles des deux phonographes d'or, perfectionnés à miracle, aujourd'hui, par moi, c'est-à-dire d'une fidélité de son de voix vraiment ... *intellectuelle* ! – et qui sont les poumons de Hadaly. (148, punctuation in original)

Instead of organic lungs and a voice box, the Andréide's speech originates in a superior, supposedly scientific, system: phonographs of pure gold which play recordings of Miss Alicia's voice. Any reader who has had experience with phonographs will pause in confusion; pure gold is an unusual (not to mention extravagant) metal either for phonographs or their recording media. Villiers was well aware of the grandiose implausibility inherent in the explanation he attributes to his protagonist; a short 1878 book on phonographs that was one of Villiers' sources (Raitt, 397) only mentions gold once, in a speculative note on galvanoplastic reproduction (Giffard 111). When Edison reveals the secret of Hadaly's golden lungs, Villiers shows Ewald caught between awestruck and bemused by the concept; his narrative persona describes the moment: "Résolu donc, plus que jamais, d'approfondir jusqu'où l'extraordinaire inventeur pourrait tenir, [Ewald] reprit: 'deux phonographes d'or? dites-vous.'" (148). To explain his choice, Villiers has Edison grandly inform his protégé that



doué d'une résonance plus fémininement sonore, plus sensible, plus  
exquise, surtout lorsqu'il est traité d'une certaine façon, l'or est le  
merveilleux métal qui ne s'oxyde pas. (149)

While the fact that gold is a “noble metal” – one that resists corrosion and oxydation and is not – may be useful to an individual who wishes to use it in biological applications, its chemical characteristics do not specifically include either extraordinary vibrational properties or feminine qualities; by providing Edison with specious reasoning for his technological choices, Villiers again suggests to his reader that his protagonist is not truly a scientist, but rather a technologist with delusions of grandeur. Villiers provides Edison with similar fallacious rationales throughout the work.

Now that Hadaly has appeared and the audience has received some tantalizing bombast regarding her origins, composition, and upkeep, Villiers is ready to reveal Edison's morally questionable inspiration for the creation of the *Andréide*: what the “genius” himself terms “*mon secret*” (176). The novel's next Book (IV) is entitled “*Le secret*,” Villiers now has Edison switch to a moral tale, nearly a moralistic parable: the tragic story of his friend Edward Anderson and the evil Miss Evelyn Habal. The Inventor's friend Anderson was, it seems, another American who was a model citizen and responsible family man, leading a morally blameless and happy domestic life until he met an alluring dancer named Evelyn Habal at the theater one evening. That same night he succumbed to Miss Habal's wiles and betrayed his wife; though Anderson thus became a base individual for Edison, his only real fault was being naïve and foolish, for a good man such as Anderson is putty in the hands of a devious woman. As Edison pronounces: “*Morale: C'est un triste mari qu'un honnête homme sans sagacité*” (184); that is, an

upright and moral individual only becomes a poor husband when he is without wisdom and therefore particularly susceptible to a woman with no scruples. This however is only the beginning of Anderson's destruction; as Villiers shapes the tale, Anderson's infidelity devastates his wife and family. They descend into penury as the ensorcelled Edward spends all their money on his loathsome mistress, and then in a fit of neurotic despair commits suicide. In his narcissistic misogyny, the legendary Edison of Villiers' creation refuses to blame his friend. He asserts ponderously asserts that "Je constate des faits. Je ne juge pas." (185).

Villiers, however, selects for a Edison a collection of supposed facts that would characterize not an accurate scientific mind, but instead that of a suffer from *la folie raisonnant*, a condition classed by Esquirol as as a condition exhibited by certain *monomanes* (Esquirol 6). Despine discusses the mental processes of these *fous raisonnants* in some detail:

les facultés intellectuelles sont intactes, mais on rencontre des perversions instinctives, morales, c'est-à-dire des passions. L'aliéné poursuit même logiquement ses idées, il raisonne, il imagine; mais, absorbé par la passion qui l'a envahi, il pense, il raisonne, il imagine, sous l'inspiration de cette passion, c'est-à-dire dans un sens opposé à la vérité, à la morale, à la raison en un mot

(Despine *De la folie* 986)

Edison's pseudo-reasoning as crafted by Villiers strongly echo Despine's description; in chapter II of Book IV, the author creates a particularly telling example of twisted logic

for his protagonist; Villiers frames a deduction by Edison of Evelyn Habal's physical characteristics in terms of an equation. Edison boasts

N'ayant jamais eu l'heur de voir de mes deux yeux la danseuse de mon ami  
Edward, je prétendis deviner d'avance et, simplement, d'après son oeuvre,  
par un calcul de probabilités, – de *pressentiments*, si vous préférez, – CE  
QU'ELLE ETAIT AU PHYSIQUE ... Miss Evelyn me représentait l'*x* d'une  
équation des plus élémentaires, après tout, puisque j'en connaissais deux  
termes : Anderson et sa mort." (186, punctuation in original).

The tone and word choices Villiers selects for his protagonist preclude the possibility that Edison intends a metaphor; his claim is meant literally. Despite the positivist desire in the nineteenth century to make the social sciences truly scientific, Edison's claim that one can perform algebra – simple algebra at that – on the process of seduction and infidelity is unquestionably beyond the pale for any scientist in his right mind. For a *monomane*, however, such smug yet fantastical declarations are *de rigueur*. The delusional analysis Villiers attributes to Edison leads him to an essential inspiration for his *Andréide*: conniving women are both masters and products of illusion. As he contemptuously declares, "leur action fatale et morbide sur LEUR victime est en raison directe de la quantité d'artificiel" (196). These temptresses are, in essence, "appearance" rather than a legitimate part of Edison's self-generated reality. This feminine deception is, of course, not due to intelligence or skill, but rather to "la pure animalité" (188). Once again, Villiers imbues his protagonist with a conviction that a large number of women are animal, or less than human; this is yet another example of the author reinforcing the reader's awareness that Edison will have no guilt over eliminating such a female.

How, though, will Villiers's protagonist try to demonstrate the absolute accuracy of his conclusions to Lord Ewald in a visceral fashion – particularly considering the young Englishman's current confusion? He resolves to use a moving picture. The real T.A. Edison was, of course, a major figure in early motion pictures though his involvement seems to have started only after the publication of *l'Ève future* (Carlson and Gorman 395), but a form of moving picture had been present since 1879 (sans Edison) (Boillat 31, n.14). With a theatrical flourish the protagonist displays – two moving pictures, both of Miss Evelyn Habal. The first of these is a film of a beautiful, sensual Miss Habal singing and dancing seductively to the sound of castanets and a tambourine; the second is a parallel film of the same woman, but with a hideous and ravaged appearance, singing lewdly to the same accompaniment (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 200-201); Villiers crafts these two images to represent Edison's ideas of the contrasting attractive appearance of women and their underlying unsavory reality; when Lord Ewald queries Edison about the nature of the second, repellant image, the author reveals Edison's distorted vision through the latter's explanation to the young Englishman:

Mais, dit tranquillement Edison, c'est la même: seulement *c'est la vraie*.

C'est celle qu'il y avait sous la semblance de l'autre ... *Ecce puella!*

s'écria-t-il. Voici la radieuse Evelyn Habal délivrée, échenillée de ses

autres attraits. N'est-ce pas que c'est pour en mourir de désirs! Ah *povera*

*innamorata!* Comme elle est séillante ainsi! Le délicieux rêve! ... une

fois la première impression produite, je vous dis que l'Illusion est tenace et

se repaît des plus odieux défauts jusqu'à, se cramponner, avec ses ongles

de chimère en démente, à la laideur, fût-elle répulsive *entre toutes*. (201-202)

The biting venom and arrogant certainty with which Villiers infuses Edison's declarations underlines his disgust and hate of women in general; Evelyn Habal was lovely when artificially aided, a creature of dreams; relieved of these false glammers, she desirable neither physically or spiritually. In the self-generated reality that Villiers formulates for his protagonist, artifice, in the hands of women, has the power to obscure even the most profound ugliness or evil.

The contrast is shocking to Lord Ewald, but he fails to ask the obvious question: where did these films come from? Was Miss Evelyn happily dancing for the Edison both with and without her beauty aids? Did Edison get an actress to play the role of Miss Evelyn based on his own imaginings? Yet again, Edison might very well be creating "evidence" out of the *monomaniaque* fixations with which the author endowed him. Villiers leaves the question unanswered by introducing additional dubious proof for Edison to display to Ewald, having him take from a drawer objects that are, in theory, the debris of Miss Evelyn Habal's deception: padding, paints, false teeth, and so on. It is, in fact, impossible to be certain whether Villiers is indicating that these *objets d'imposture* are truly be from the despised seductress or that they are props that Edison has acquired by methods that cannot help but be *louche*. However Edison truly obtained his artifacts, the author has him insist in the arrogant manner of a *monomane* that they are "*ses vrais ossements*" (207).

The idea of a soul separated from a body (and death) recurs as well, as it has regularly earlier in the novel, albeit in a very subtle form. Edison claims that the

aforementioned drawer contains “ces mânes” (207) . For “manes” a contemporary Larousse dictionary gives denotations of both “souls of the dead” and “chez les anciens” (381), while the editor Alain Raitt suggests that Villiers confused the term with the Latin “manere” (“remains”); it is entirely possible that Villiers intended the word to be ambiguous and thus reflect his protagonists devotion to his own interpretation of reality. Edison is refering to Miss Evlyn Habal, but the fact that we have previously seen the concept of the soul divided from the body in the case of a destructive woman (the goal of Edison’s so-called experiment with Miss Alicia) suggests once more that the protagonist is undisturbed by the idea of destroying a (female) living being, and considers the real woman of as little worth as an android.

With this explanation the author gives the audience a reminder that in Edison’s hands, the nature of reality is self-generated, that of a *monomane*; one cannot be certain what is true and what is delusional in his first-person monologues and statements. Just because an English lord takes the protagonist’s assertions as gospel does not mean that Villiers intends for the reader to do the same; to the contrary, the gullibility that the author attributes to Lord Ewald provides the reader a sense of what not to think. In *Maldoror*, it was glaringly obvious that both the accomplice (Aghone) and victim (Mervyn) were entirely too credulous where Maldoror himself was concerned, and Ducasse is clearly warning his audience not to imitate them. Villiers is more subtle than Ducasse, but Ewald’s faith is obviously harmful to him and has a strong air of foolishness to boot; there is no reason for the reader to take his judgement as dispositive. Villiers creates in Ewald a character who is at least partly convinced that Edison has extraordinary – perhaps even unique – powers of creation, but the reader may have lost

track of the ferocity of Edison's emphasis on his near-divine creative supremacy. Villiers is careful to bring back his protagonist's *monomaniaque* self-identification with God; Edison claims that once he has solved the scientific equation of love and spread it over the whole world he will have saved huge numbers of lives:

... obtenir de la Science une équation de l'Amour ... Une fois cette  
formule trouvée et jetée à travers le monde, je sauverai peut-être, d'ici à  
peu d'années, des milliers et des milliers d'existences. (209, punctuation  
except ellipses in original)

The ability to even make an equation out of love, much less solve it is truly unique to an individual who is something beyond extraordinary. In the protagonist's claim to be able to save "thousands and thousand of existences," Villiers knows that the reader will know that Edison is referring to male lives. With Edison's declaration that he is capable of saving such a vast number of lives Villiers implies certain echoes of Christ, relatively common in *monomes d'orgueil* (and hence another occurrence of the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ). Moreover, Edison explicitly mentions his ability to create seeming life out of nothing; he asserts that by taking advantage of a convenient medium, "J'ai suscité de l'ombre, Hadaly" (210).

Edison somehow feels that the foolish Ewald needs to know the anatomical details of the fake female, despite the Englishman's continuing bafflement about almost everything; this is another sign from Villiers that his protagonist is prone to the arrogance of *monomanie*. Thus follows an introduction to the painfully extensive discussion of Hadaly's component parts – it is a singular image, one that is as profoundly disturbing as Edison himself: "Il toucha l'une des bagues de Hadaly. L'armure féminine s'entrouvrit

lentement” (212). Though the reader knows that Hadaly is not really “alive,” the gesture still provokes a nearly unavoidable association with vivisection, yet another criminal practice. Ewald himself is in some measure distressed by this unusual dissection; Villiers reports that “Lord Ewald tressaillit et devint fort pâle” (212). The author does not initially make it clear whether his horror originates solely from the mental shock of witnessing such an act, from a moral repulsion as well, or from some other emotional jolt. The next sentence, however, reveals that the Englishman’s nerve storm is meant to be due to the ultimately decisive proof (as far as he is concerned) of the Andréide’s artificial nature and Edison’s purportedly scientific virtuosity:

Jusque-là le doute l’avait, malgré lui, hanté. Malgré les paroles formelles de son interlocuteur, il lui avait été impossible d’admettre que l’Être qui lui avait donné, à ce point, l’illusion d’une vivante incluse dans une armure fût un être tout à fait fictif, né de la Science, de la patience, et du génie. (212, punctuation in original)

Despite Villiers’ characterization of Ewald as basically unintelligent and lacking imagination, it is a mystery why the narrative persona (not the author himself) portrays the Englishman as having been so skeptical; since his entrance into the narrative, Lord Ewald has shown total confidence in the Edison’s genius. What Villiers accomplishes with young Lord’s seeming about-face is, however, to reinforce yet again the protagonist has the power to pull another person in his self-generated reality in which he has nearly supernatural powers.



In the first several chapters of Book 5 – “Hadaly” – Edison, utterly incapable of not vaunting his own genius,<sup>51</sup> ponderously perorates to Ewald upon the minute details of Hadaly’s construction. Without exploring these technicalities in too much detail, I will merely note the highlights that reinforce Edison’s previous self- characterizations. Villiers continues Edison’s now-familiar mania for ridiculously convoluted logic and unreliable so-called facts, having his protagonist loftily inform Ewald that

"Nos mouvements, à part ceux de quelques convulsifs ou trop nerveux sont presque toujours le mêmes ... Mais j’ai calculé, en décomposant leurs dérivés, que vingt-sept ou vingt-huit mouvements, au plus, constituent déjà une rare personnalité." (217)

The “twenty-seven or twenty-eight” figure is inherently unreliable; perhaps one might be able to come up with a figure for a certain number of basic movements, but these figures seem to be quite low for the entire body, and what are we to imagine Edison means by “a rare personality?” The pseudo-logic here echos another example in chapter II of Book V that Villiers formulates with a complete and obvious irrationality:

"... calculer, par exemple, la somme d’heures qu’un perruquier de soixante ans, ayant commencé son métier à dix-huit ans, a dépensée à dire ... : “Il fait beau ou vilain temps !” ... la conversation, laquelle ... roule cinq minutes sur ce sujet, pour être *automatiquement* reprise par le menton suivant ... Cela donne un peu plus de *quatorze* années" (226, punctuation except for ellipses in original)

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<sup>51</sup> as is the case with so many *monomanes*

I can detect no indication that Edison is joking or merely exaggerating. It is typical of Villiers' portrayal of his protagonist that the latter can proffer such absurd faux-scientific assertions without hesitation.

Bogus science also appears in the nearly endless details of Hadaly's construction; as in the Inventor's explanation of her golden lungs, these details seem to contain real scientific terms, but in combination with completely non-scientific attributes that are inappropriate or illogical. When detailing the Andréide's skeletal structure, Villiers has Edison inform his audience (once more through a rhetorical device – the rhetorical question) that Hadaly has a skeleton of finished ivory, connected to the “armure” by crystal rings: “Toute cette ossature d’ivoire n’est-elle pas d’un fini délicieux ? Ce charmant squelette est retenu à l’armure par ces anneaux de cristal” (229). Why does Villiers have Edison describe the “finish” of the skeleton as “délicieux”? Does this contribute to the Andréide's efficiency? Will a large number of people be examining it? Even if one keeps an open mind about a skeleton constructed entirely of ivory (a bone-like substance but not identical to bone itself), attachments of crystal rings are an odd and unexpected choice. Presumably, Villiers intends Edison to suggest rock crystal; all the same, there is a disconnect between what he has used in the past (this includes specially tempered glass) and his introduction of crystal. In addition, the the protagonist himself points out – then justifies – a drawback of the use of crystal; as he grudgingly notes, “Quant au léger bruit incessant du cristal sur la coulisse et les rondelles, il est absolument étouffé par le charme de la Carnation ... on ne l’entendrait qu’au microphone” (234) . How, exactly, would the charm of flesh conceal the noise of these artificial joints in their crystalline clinking? It would seem that Hadaly's pseudo-flesh exemplifies the

conception of aesthetic perfection that Villiers formulates for Edison; in the protagonist's self-generated reality, synthetic beauty can render any indicators of her mechanical nature irrelevant or even invisible. Perfect as Hadaly is, however, she is only one component of the *Andréide*. The author has already indicated that Miss Alicia's essence must become part of the *Andréide* once it had been separated from her body; through Edison's interactions with the medium Sowana in Book I, chapter IV, Villiers had informed the reader that to complete the triad making up the artificial woman, it would be necessary for Hadaly to combine with this medium (whose real name is Mistress Anderson) in order for her to have volition and any form of spirit<sup>52</sup>. Villiers has Mistress Anderson, in her role of Sowana, explicate this phenomenon:

“J'aime mieux être en cette enfant-vibrante qu'en moi. Quelle créature sublime! Elle existe de l'état supérieur où je me trouve en ce moment; elle est imbue de nos deux volontés s'unifiant en elle; c'est UNE dualité. Ce n'est pas une conscience, c'est un esprit!” (48, punctuation in original)

The medium's situation is definitely unlike that of Miss Alicia. Villiers has been clear that Mistress Anderson is eager to leave her own existence behind and meld with Hadaly; Miss Alicia is ignorant of her impending subsumation into the *Andréide*, and in Edison's discussion with Ewald about the reactions of the young lady to the protagonist's “experiment” Villiers made it clear that even in Edison's self-generated reality it is impossible to envision acceptance on her part.

Despite the revelation of the dual identity of Sowana that Villiers introduced in Book I, Sowana remains mysterious. When he introduces the medium, the author offers no

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<sup>52</sup> Sowana is the woman's “nom de sommeil,” i.e., the name she bears while in a trance.

information about her origins though in Book IV, chapter VI, Villiers has Edison declare tantalizingly that he will reveal her background and motivations at a later point: “une sorte de voyante du nom de Sowana, dont je vous parlerai plus tard” (210). Villiers fulfills Edison’s promise in chapter XIII of Book VI, albeit by having Lord Ewald prompt the protagonist for these details. In this chapter, Villiers divulges an unsystematic – and possibly disingenuous – collection of facts about Mistress Anderson first through the protagonist’s recollection of a statement by Miss Alicia, and then through the addition of the “voyant” to the extensive and convoluted tale of Edward Anderson and Miss Evelyn Habal that Villiers formulated for the character of Edison. The author undermines the reliability of these pieces of information by having Miss Alicia and Edison refer to the medium by different names; Miss Alicia identifies the woman as “Mistress Any (*sic*) Sowana,” a middle-aged female sculptor with a melancholy *meine* while Edison uses her mundane name of “Mistress Anderson,” an unstable woman inextricably bound to the tragedy of Mr. Anderson and Miss Habal (300-331). In having Edison be the source for Mistress Anderson’s background and true character, Villiers firmly fixes this description within Edison’s self-generated reality, much as he did with the account of Mr. Anderson’s tragedy; by having the reader rely of necessity on the protagonist’s selection of facts and his interpretation of their importance, Villiers creates doubt about his protagonist’s explanation of Mistress Anderson’s role in the story of Edward Anderson and Miss Evelyn Habal, her status as a medium, and the origins of her eagerness for becoming a part of the *Andréide*.

As the reader may suspect, Mistress Anderson is Edward Anderson’s widow.

Villiers has his protagonist divulge that he considers the story of “Sowana” a contiguous

part of the tragedy of Mr. Anderson. Edison introduces this connection supposedly to enlighten Ewald, but Villiers' formulation of his statement and tone imply that the protagonist's dramatic recitation and seeming desire to astound his interlocutor may be subtle indicators of his *monomanie d'orgueil* and *monomanie Narcisse*:

“Vous vous rappelez, n'est-ce pas, l'histoire que je vous ai contée, *en bas*, d'un certain Edward Anderson ? Ce que vous me demandez n'est autre que la *fin* de cette histoire: - la voici.” (331, punctuation in original)

Villiers is here adding a mawkish coda to the story of Mr. Anderson, one that recounts the aftermath of his death. According to Edison's narrative, Mistress Anderson was the victim of a plethora of misfortunes upon becoming a widow:

“Sous le coup de la triste mort et de la ruine deson mari, Mistress Anderson, se voyant dépossédée de sa maison, subitement, –sans pain même, et vouée, avec ses deux enfants de dix a douze ans, à la très problématique charité de quelques banales connaissances commerciales, fut, tout d'abord, atteinte d'un mal qui la réduisit à l'inaction complète, d'une de ces grandes névroses reconnues incurables, celle du Sommeil.”  
(331, punctuation in original)

According to contemporary French psychological literature on sleep, there are multiple types of “névrose” which include seriously disordered sleep,:

Les personnes qui succombent auit pratiques magnétiques et hypnotiques souffrent à des degrés divers de ces névroses que l'on a nommées le

somnambulisme, l'hystérie<sup>53</sup>, la catalepsie, la névrose hypnotique (Dr Ladame); névroses qui ne sont pas nettement définies dans l'état actuel de la science. (Yung 154)

Villiers has Edison group all sleep disorders under the classification of a “névrose de sommeil,” an incurable pathology; this contention is unsupported in the scientific literature, and belongs more properly to the pseudo-science inherent in the protagonist’s self-generated reality<sup>54</sup>. some of these conditions are, as well, connected to sensitivity to hypnotism The exaggerated nature of the description of Mistress Anderson’s plight that the author has Edison recount and the protagonist’s evident misinterpretation (or possibly misrepresentation) of her grief-induced mental pathology suggest once again the *monomanie* in the character of Edison and the *monomane*’s unreliability; there is a strong possibility that the speech created by Villiers will in part reveal self-aggrandizement by the protagonist.

In support of the idea that Villiers is emphasizing the protagonist’s portrayal of himself as extraordinary and beyond other men, he has Edison imply that upon meeting Mistress Anderson in her impoverished condition, he began to support her out of supposed humanitarianism and altruism; it was later, he claims, he discovered her *névrosé* condition and mediumistic powers and realized what a valuable tool she could become for him: “Alors, Mistress Any (*sic*) Anderson *devint mon secret*. ... cette aptitude, qui

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<sup>53</sup> In the 1880s, men could also suffer from “hysteria;” thus, Yung’s comments are quite general and applicable to a wide variety of *névrosés*.

<sup>54</sup> Yung mentions several types of cures, although with some skepticism: “Laisser agir la nature, tout en tranquillisant le malade par l’administration de substances inoffensives ... que l’on baptise du nom de remèdes, agir sur son moral en le persuadant de sa prompte guérison et l’entourer de soins hygiéniques” as well as “l’étude expérimentale des médicaments,” Yung, Émile. *Le sommeil normal et le sommeil pathologique magnétisme animal, hypnotisme, névrose hystérique*. O. Doin, 1883. *Bibliothèque biologique internationale*, M. J.-L. de Lanessan, vol. XII.

m'est, d'ailleurs, naturelle, à la projection de ma volonté, se développa, vite" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam 333, punctuation except ellipses in original). Presumably because Mistress Anderson is only truly valuable to the *monomane d'orgueil* in her role as a medium, Villiers limits Edison to addressing "Sowana" when speaking to the woman. The firm conviction that Villiers attributes to his protagonist that if a woman is useful it is because she can serve Edison's plans; his genius is typical for such a misogynist. The question remains how the author will have Edison put Mistress Anderson's mediumistic talents to use in providing the Andréide with a spirit. Again Villiers creates a pseudo-scientific explanation for Edison to recount to Lord Ewald. This description recounts the protagonist's presentation to Mr. Anderson's stricken widow of the Andréide's basic concept and how he intended to use the late Evelyn Habal in this creation:

"après le trépas de la belle Evelyn Habal, l'artificielle fille, je crus devoir faire montre à Sowana des reliques burlesques apportées par moi de Philadelphie, en manière de dépouilles opimes. En même temps, je lui communiquai l'esquisse, déjà très nette, de ma conception de Hadaly"  
(335)

The author leaves Edison's motivation for revealing his plans to Mistress Anderson opaque; the protagonist may once more be reinforcing his own unique brilliance to his interlocutor or he may be subtly inviting the widow's participation in his *Grand Oeuvre*. Villiers does, however clearly indicate Mistress Anderson's motive for participating in the complete obliteration of Miss Habal down to her remains and for vengeance on the temptress and Mistress Anderson's consequent enthusiasm for Edison's project.

"Vous ne sauriez croire avec quelle joie sombre, nouvelle et comme vengeresse, elle accueillit et encouragea mon projet! Elle n'eût point de trêve que je ne me fusse mis à l'œuvre" (335)

In Mistress Anderson's zealous encouragement of the protagonist's creation of the Andréide, the author has her become an element of Edison's self-generated reality, to a greater extent even than Lord Ewald.

To remind the reader of the specific and paranormal role the widow will play the creation of Edison's artificial woman, Villiers reiterates the explanation of Sowana's conception of her function in his project: she wants to meld with the physical shell of Hadaly to provide a spirit for the Andréide:

"Sowana, les yeux fermés, perdue hors de la pesanteur de tout organisme, s'incorporait, vision fluide, en Hadaly! ... [elle] me demanda de lui en expliquer les plus secrets arcanes – afin, l'ayant étudiée en totalité, de pouvoir, *à l'occasion*, S'Y INCORPORER ELLE-MEME ET L'ANIMER DE SON ETAT 'SURNATUREL'" (335-336, punctuation other than ellipses in original)

Villiers emphasizes the mediumistic widow's paranormal role as Sowana and her lack of utility as plain Mistress Anderson; as Sowana, she is able to touch the immaterial world, sliding mentally into the mechanical body of Hadaly and manipulate it by a combination of will and technological control.

The author constructs for Edison an supposedly scientific "mechanism" for this phenomenon:



“l’inquiète songeuse, étendue sur des coussins jetés sur une large planche  
de verre au supports isolants, tenait le clavier d’induction dont les touches  
l’électrisaient doucement et entretenaient un courant entre elle et  
l’Andréide" (337)

The protagonist blatantly uses of scientific bits and pieces in the service of his own self-generated reality. Villiers’ formulation of Edison’s explanation is yet another example of the *monomanie* that the author incorporates into the character; Edison will use any individual and any technique to advance his *oeuvre*.

Hadaly and Sowana form two thirds of the Andréide: Hadaly as the mechanical body with generic features and Sowana as the spirit and motive force. One element is still missing from the Andréide as fashioned by Villiers: the physical features and characteristics of a specific individual by which the artificial woman will be able to replace a real one, here Miss Alicia Clary. Though Villiers never has Miss Alicia remains ignorant of the Andréide and never comes in physical or mental contact with Hadaly, Miss Alicia’s role as the model for the Andréide’s physical qualities is just as essential to the protagonist’s “experiment” as that of Sowana. We can see in this *mélange* an example of multi-layered  $\frac{\text{appearance}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; Villiers creates different levels of correspondance to empirical reality for each of the three elements of the Andréide. The singer is explicitly a source only of outer appearance, Hadaly consists of the physical structure and inner mechanisms of Edison’s creation, and Sowana provides the intangible qualities of mind and spirit. Miss Alicia supplies the most superficial level of the incompatibility between appearance and reality for the Andréide; in the artificial woman’s ability to substitute for Miss Alicia Clary, she takes on no more than the outer

façade of a being. Hadaly's contribution is real in the sense of being the technological structure and mechanics in the *Andréide*, but represents appearance as well in the hidden nature of her inner workings. Sowana is the source of the artificial woman's seeming sentience, a quality that in theory is in theory the ultimate reality of humanity; even so, this aspect of the *Andréide* does not truly belong to her and reveals the ultimate conflict between Edison's creation and the empirical reality of a living being.

The audience eventually meets Miss Alicia in Book VI, completing our introduction to the three parts of the *Andréide*. More importantly, Villiers uses this *belle femme*'s supper visit to Edison's mansion serves to give the reader direct knowledge of various details that the Englishman had provided in characterizing her. We are invited to compare the words and actions of the singer during this visit with Ewald's previous claims; the extent of the contrast depends largely on the reader's opinion of artists' typical behavior. She definitely resembles the statue that Villiers has described: "Cette femme – vivante évocation des lignes de la *Venus victrix* ... La ressemblance avec le divin marbre apparaissait immédiatement, si frappante, si incontestable..." (271). Harkening back to Villiers' allusions to Pygmalion, the narrative persona's emphasis on the similarities between the living woman and the masterpiece of statuary implies their possible interchangeability as well as suggesting that Edison's superhuman ability to create life. Once she begins to speak, Miss Alicia also displays elements of the bourgeois attitudes that Ewald had previously described, though the author's formulation of the protagonist's asides to Ewald and ironic statements to Miss Alicia echo the narrative persona's characterizations of the singer's contemptible conversation and philosophies. Yet again, Villiers presents an incompatibility that recalls the philosophical pair

appearance  
empirical reality . For example, Miss Alicia speaks with “une intonation de patronne de magasin” yet at the same time with “un timbre de voix d’une limpidité idéale” (271). Villiers provides Edison with essentially cruel judgements and machinations with Ewald as accessory that alternate with admiring descriptions of Miss Alicia’s voice, clothes, and general loveliness. Edison’s cruelest piece of cynical manipulation is his claim to the culturally deficient beauty that he is “Maître Thomas! Le représentant général des grands théâtres d’Angleterre et d’Amérique!” (272). This piece of blatant fraud is essential to the reader’s judgement of both Miss Alicia and, both directly and through her, of the protagonist. While it may seem venal for the actress to latch on to the possibility of a larger audience and renown, Villiers is deliberately ambiguous about whether her materialism is bourgeois greed or practicality in a precarious profession. In either case, the audience (including the dim-witted Ewald) realizes instantly that Edison will capture Miss Alicia through her cupidity. In this fashion, Villiers merely piles up more evidence of Edison’s nature as a *monomaniaque* without morality and in pursuit of his own obsessions by any and all methods. He is stealing the identity (perhaps the soul) of a human being (though we realize, or soon will, that there will be no physical homicide involved), while glorifying himself and demonstrating his self-generated attribution of supernatural powers.

Though Villiers constructed for his readers a protagonist who exists in his own self-generated reality, a criminal *monomane d’orgueil* and *monomane Narcisse*, he does not attribute a physical murder to Edison; instead he ascribes a more subtle homicide to his protagonist, who destroys life in pursuit of his own *monomaniaque* goals. The murder that Villiers has Edison perform is the theft of an individual’s soul, her motive force and

sentience. Significantly, this event occurs in the penultimate chapter (Book VI, chapter XIV), rather than at the very end of the work. When the narrative persona reveals the death of Sowana (Mistress Anderson), the reader discovers that it is only the narrative persona who describes the death; at this point, Villiers restricts the protagonist's reactions to an attempt to revive the woman and a confirm that she is truly dead:

Comme la voyante ne répondait pas, l'électricien lui prit la main: la main, glacée, le fit tressaillir; il se pencha; le pouls ne battait plus, le cœur était immobile ... Edison s'aperçut, au bout d'une heure d'axiété et d'efforts de volition devenus stériles, que celle qui semblait dormir avait définitivement quitté le monde des humains. (346)

Villiers here adds another example of Edison's arrogant *monomanie* and vision of himself as a Jesus-like figure, one who has confidence (albeit in reality unwarranted) in his ability to bring the dead to life. In addition, Villiers reinforces Edison's lack of empathy or regret for his fatal actions by excluding any sign of such emotions in the narrative persona's account and skipping over the immediate aftermath of Sowana's death.

We have thus arrived at the beginning of the end of the *Andréide*; death had been an element in the anecdotes Villiers attributes to his protagonist, but it has become the underlying theme in Edison's actions and reactions as the author formulates them. Despite Villiers' frequent and detailed emphasis of Edison's destructive plans and exploits, the author remains curiously ambiguous on the question of whether the death of Sowana, the *Andréide*'s animating spirit, is also the death of that soul, or whether this intangible force had in fact moved to Hadaly completely rather than being shared between these two parts of the artificial woman. In chapter I of Book V, Villiers had

provided a systematic model of the *Andréide*'s various elements for Edison's explanations to Lord Ewald; the first of these is Sowana's contribution:

"L'*Andréide*, dit-il impassiblement, se subdivise en quatre parties:

1° Le Système-vivant, intérieur, qui comprend l'Equilibre, la Démarche, la Voix, le Geste, les Sens, les Expressions-futures du visage, le Mouvement-régulateur intime, ou, pour mieux dire, l'Ame." (213)

The author has his protagonist label this first constituent with key words and phrases: "Le Système-vivant," "intérieur," and "l'Ame." This phrasing is essential to the differentiation between Sowana's portion of the *Andréide* and those of Hadaly and Miss Alicia. The aspects of the artificial woman provided by the medium are purportedly connected to life, to the inner individual, and the soul. These are all immaterial attributes without which the *Andréide* would be no more than a beautiful statue fashioned to resemble Miss Alicia Clary. According to Edison's speech, the other three physical elements of the artificial woman encompass Hadaly's and Miss Alicia's roles in the *Andréide*:

"2° Le Médiateur-plastique, c'est-à-dire l'enveloppe métallique ... en laquelle le système intérieur est solidement fixé ... 3° La Carnation (ou chair factice proprement dite) superposée au Médiateur ... pénétrante et pénétrée par le fluide animant ... 4° L'Epiderme ou peau-humaine" (213, punctuation except ellipses in original).

In other words, the *Andréide* only takes physical attributes of appearance from Hadaly and Miss Alicia Clary; these two parts of the artificial woman are strictly and explicitly elements of "appearance," producing a creation life-like but lifeless. In Villiers'

representation, until the final step of her creation the Andréide can only demonstrate human sensations and reactions when Sowana shares her true sentience with Edison's physical creation. At the end of the process in Chapter XII, Villiers had Edison declare the fabrication and animation of the Andréide a success:

“si j'ai fourni physiquement ce qu'elle a de terrestre et d'illusoire, une Ame qui m'est inconnue s'est superposée à mon oeuvre et, s'y incorporant à jamais, a réglé, croyez-moi, les moindres détails de ces scènes effrayantes et douces avec un art si subtil qu'il passe, en vérité, de l'homme.” (343)

Villiers does not make it clear whether the Andréide's completion transfers Sowana's soul completely or merely allows the artificial woman to operate independently. It seems that the Andréide is no longer dependant on the medium, but the author is ambiguous about the status of Sowana's spirit; is she still whole, having donated to the artificial woman a part or a copy of her soul, or is she an empty shell, having transferred her sentience entirely to the Andréide?

Upon Sowana's death, Villiers leaves it to the reader to determine what, if any, might be the consequences of the medium's demise; at this point neither the protagonist nor the narrative persona speculate on the results of this disruption of the link between the Andréide and Sowana. The author announces Sowana's death through the medium of the narrative persona, who describes Edison's actions; Villiers' phrasing of the narrative persona's account allows him to avoid resolving the conundrum of the fate of Sowana's soul: “celle qui semblait dormir avait définitivement quitté le monde des humains” (346). The narrative persona does not use the word “dead” or “deceased;” similarly, words suggesting complete destruction or elimination are also absent from the description.

Villiers' phrasing instead subtly leaves the fate of Sowana's spirit ambiguous, having the narrative persona characterize Edison's realization that the medium is dead. As the narrative persona relays, she "seems to be sleeping," and "had left the world of humanity." Both these phrases can serve either as euphemistic descriptions of death or as indicators that some immaterial essence of life remains. The author denies the reader explicit clues as to which meaning he intends to convey; though he has Edison admit that Sowana's body has perished, both the narrative persona in the background and the protagonist in the foreground fail to allude to the state of Sowana's intangible essence. From this point onward, Sowana (and Mistress Anderson) disappear entirely from the narrative.

At the beginning of Chapter XV Villiers informs the reader through his narrative persona that roughly three weeks have passed since the end of Chapter XIV and Sowana's death. After mentioning the lapse of time, the narrative persona describes Edison's state of mind; he is worried by the lack of news regarding his experiment: "M. Edison, n'ayant reçu ni lettres ni dépêches de lord Ewald, commençait à s'inquieter de ce silence" (346). Though the persona does not explicitly state that the protagonist's unease originates in his concern over whether or not the substitution of the Andréide for Miss Alicia has succeeded, throughout the narrative, the author portrayed Edison as a *monomane* who shows no regard for the feelings and welfare of others; the implication, then, is that the protagonist is not worried about Ewald's well-being *per se*, but rather concerned about the place of Ewald and the Andréide in his *oeuvre*. During this three-week period, Lord Ewald and his false Alicia have embarked on the voyage back to England; the real Miss Alicia is on the same ship (the *Wonderful*), and the Andréide is

secreted in the hold in her sarcophagus. Though Sowana is deceased, she had accomplished her purpose: Miss Alicia Clary's synthetic double is "real," and ready to take the singer's place by Lord Ewald's side once they reach England.

The *monomaniaque* character that Villiers has given his protagonist means that though he may be concerned by Lord Ewald's silence, Edison cannot foresee any failure for the ultimate goal of his project. Edison learns, however, from a newspaper article that the *Wonderful* has burned and sunk in transit (as did the first of its lifeboats):

Le feu s'est déclaré à l'arrière ... dans les compartiments des marchandises ... comme le steamer tanguait assez durement, la nappe de flamme, en un instant, pénétra dans le compartiment des bagages. ... La première chaloupe de sauvetage, surchargée de femmes et d'enfants, a chaviré. (346-348)

The paper adds several important details. Lord Ewald ("Lord E\*\*\*\*" in the article) had to be restrained after knocking down a lieutenant and the third officer in an attempt to brave the flames to get to the baggage hold. This melodramatic indication of Ewald's final obsession with the *Andréide* proves both Edison's ability to save men from devotion to women and the young Englishman's lack of sense. The fact that the *Andréide*'s physical form, in her coffin in the hold, definitively ceases to exist as anything other than ashes floating in the Atlantic marks the destruction (if not actual death) of Edison's creation. The author removes responsibility from Edison for the proximate cause of this destruction; it is an act of God, who ultimately trumps the protagonist. Even so, Edison contributes in a small way to the ultimate cause; it is he, according to Villiers' portrayal, who decided that his artificial woman should travel insentient in a sarcophagus inside a



crate placed in a ship's hold. Because of these multiple, concentric confinements, there is absolutely no way that in the case of a disaster the *Andréide* could be saved, unless it were a very slow disaster indeed. Edison does not kill his creation, but does make the chances that anyone could prevent her destruction vanishingly small. Another critical detail included by Villiers in his fictitious newspaper account involves Miss Alicia, the model for the *Andréide*'s physical characteristics; the paper's list of those who died in the first unfortunate lifeboat reports "dans les premiers noms figurait celui de Miss *Emma-Alicia Clary, artiste lyrique*" (348). The death of the final component of the *Andréide* appears to be the least perturbing aspect of the disaster, at least to Lord Ewald. Edison's accomplice telegraphs him "c'est de Hadaly seule que je suis inconsolable" (348). For the shallow protégé of Edison the misogynist, the destruction of a simulacrum is more moving and tragic than the terrible death of a real (and supposedly beloved) woman who has already served her function in the protagonist's *Grand oeuvre*?

Thus, Villiers completes the unravelling of Thomas Edison's *monomaniaque* experiment. There is no longer an *Andréide*. Villiers supplies Edison with a somewhat sullen reaction to the destruction of the *Wonderful* and the destruction of his creation and a lack of grief for the human aspect of the tragedy. Initially angry, in between reading the newspaper article and reading Ewald's telegram Edison "jeta le journal violemment" (348); after reading Ewald's telegram the protagonist becomes more disappointed and uncertain:

ses regards distraits rencontrèrent, non loin de lui, la table d'ébène: une clarté lunaire pâlisait encore le bras charmant, la main blanche aux bagues enchantées! Et, songeur attristé, se perdant en des impressions

inconnues, ses yeux s'étant reportés au dehors, sur la nuit (348,  
punctuation in original)

While Villiers does not have his narrative persona describe the protagonist's thoughts themselves, he still conveys Edison's general attitude of dissatisfaction and the his central preoccupation: his *magnum opus*. Once his thoughts begin to wander, Edison's attention fixes on the disconnected arm that the author had introduced in Chapter VIII of Book I, his triumphal example of artificial feminine life; he is a dreamer disturbed by the failure of his dream, the perfect artificial woman.

In the final few sentences, Edison's preoccupied gaze turn to the outdoors, that is, to the physical universe. Villiers describes his protagonist looking out his window into the night:

Il écouta, pendant quelque temps, l'indifférent vent d'hiver ... - puis son  
regard s'étant levé, enfin, vers les vieilles sphères lumineuses qui brûlait,  
impassibles, ... à l'infini, l'inconcevable mystère des cieux (349)

This establishes a definite disconnect between the idea of Edison as a near-supernatural creative deity and the fact of his lack of effect on empirical reality; the empirical universe is indifferent to Edison. He himself seems to recognize this rejection at the very end, though Villiers' text closes with deliberate plurivocality and ambiguity: "il frissona, - de froid, sans doute, - en silence." (349, punctuation in original). Given the sharp contrast between Edison *monomanique* self-image and the impassivity of the physical universe, when Villiers has the narrative persona ascribe Edison's shiver "to cold, doubtlessly," the author is very likely is sharing (in a conspiratorial fashion) a cutting piece of irony with the audience. On the most superficial level, the "cold" is an obviously disingenuous

claim; in a metaphorical sense, it is accurate: the universe treats Edison coldly. His chill is indeed not physiological, but almost certainly due to an at least subconscious recognition that there is something larger than he – something that he cannot dominate with his putative power and magnetism. Coloring Edison's reaction is the undeniable fact, glaringly obvious to Villiers' readers, that the protagonist is not only lacking godly powers, but is shockingly (for him) susceptible to loss of control due to the empirical universe's ability to resist his will. Despite Edison's omniscient preparations and cunning solving of unfathomable equations, his entire experiment is easily wrecked by a single, not uncommon act of God: the sinking of a ship. This final unexpected thwarting of Edison's expectations becomes the ultimate expression of the incompatibility between his self-generated reality and empirical reality. Villiers tells his audience that physical reality – that is the visible and concrete elements of nature themselves – decisively denies Edison's *monomane* delusion.

DISSOCIATED GRANDIOSITY – *LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR AND L'ÈVE FUTURE*  
*Les Chants de Maldoror* and *L'Ève future* feature protagonists with criminal forms of *monomanie*; Maldoror and Edison share certain aspects of delusion, particularly *monomanies Narcisse* and *d'orgueil*. They both demonstrate obsession with a vision of themselves as creators; their self-generated realities correspond to Lagardelle's 1869 impassioned definition of "orgueil":

l'amour déréglé de soi-même qui fait qu'on se préfère aux autres, est peut-être la passion la plus vile et la plus misérable de toutes celles qui rendent l'homme grand ou méprisable selon l'usage qu'il en fait. Ce vice ... en développant les mauvais instincts, abrutit l'intelligence... se fait une gloire

de tout, aussi bien des qualités physiques qu'il croit avoir que des qualités  
morales qu'il n'a jamais eues (10-11)

The two protagonists' self-generated realities as depicted by Ducasse and Villiers feature many of these indicators; the portraits of the authors' protagonists certainly feature an extravagant love of self and distortions of human impulses as well as exaggerated and inaccurate estimations of their own powers on the part of Maldoror and Edison. This characterization eminently fits the protagonists' conviction of themselves as their authors draw them in that they are god-like geniuses with exceptional qualities, both moral and physical; Ducasse and Villiers' inclusion of such characteristics help define Maldoror and Edison as criminal *monomanes*.

When we turn to the ultimate comparison of these two works, we find that the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{self-generated reality}}{\text{empirical result}}$  reflects the basic correspondence between *Maldoror* and *L'Ève future*; the *monomaniaque* nature of Maldoror's and Edison's delusional claims demonstrate a strong contrast to the less awe-inspiring nature of these characters in empirical reality. In this contrast, the reader sees the twisted nature of self-proclaimed genius as well as its fraudulence and criminal character. It is clear that blind belief in the truth of *monomaniaque* self-generated reality is ultimately fatal to those who follow those dangerous *monomanes Narcisse* and *d'orgueil*, turning them into victims such as Mervyn or Mistress Anderson.

## CHAPTER IV:

### ALTERNATIVE CERTAINTY: LA NÉVROSE AND “ALTERNATIVE” REALITY – *À REBOURS* AND *CONTES D’UN BUVEUR D’ÉTHÉR*

In this chapter, I shall begin by defining a pathological mental condition of great significance in nineteenth-century French psychological theories: *la névrose*, a broad grouping of functional and sensorial distortions with connections to deviation from empirical reality. I shall also define how these deviations fit into the model of incongruity between the outside world and a sufferer’s perceptions of reality. I shall follow by introducing two *fin de siècle* fictional texts whose authors drew portraits of *névrosés* and their attempts to force their own alternative realities into congruence with empirical reality: Joris-Karl Huysmans’ *À Rebours* and Jean Lorrain’s *Contes d’un buveur d’éther*. Huysmans and Lorrain had their *névrosé* protagonists pursue ultimate truth within their pathological perceptions; the authors characterize these efforts through their protagonists’ attempts to provoke and explore their altered perceptions and the insistence the authors give their principal characters on the superior validity of their distorted perceptions in relation to more common views of the real universe. *À Rebours* will be the first work I analyze in the context of nineteenth-century French models of *névrose* and sufferers’ devotion to their alternative realities; specifically, I shall discuss the symptomology of addiction to aesthetics and hallucination that Huysmans attributes to his protagonist. I shall continue with an examination of *Contes d’un buveur d’éther* in this context of alternative reality while analyzing Lorrain’s depiction of substance abuse and sensory delusion in his main characters. After analyzing the parallels between the *névrose* and search for reality within distorted perceptions that the authors use to shape their protagonists, I shall investigate how Huysmans and Lorrain use alterations and

conflations of their narratives' timelines to induce in their readers a sense of the alternative reality they attribute to their protagonists.

Because the terms *névrose* and its associated adjective *névrosé* are foreign to the majority of modern readers, it is essential to investigate their contemporary definitions and significance. Technically, the noun *névrose* translates to “neurosis” and the adjective *névrosé* to “neurotic;” this translation, however, is problematic due to the difference between the two English words' historical meanings (i.e., in the nineteenth century) and the modern definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* makes the distinction in clear terms: it defines the historical meaning as “any disease or disorder characterized by abnormal nervous or mental function, esp. when unaccompanied by other systemic or local disease; a primary or functional neurological disease or disorder,” and the modern meaning as a “psychological disorder in which there is disabling or distressing anxiety, without severe disorganization or distortion of behaviour or personality” and relates to “psychosis” (Dictionary “*neurosis, n.*”). It is very difficult for a modern reader to ignore the modern definitions of the term; hence, it is clearer to simply use the nineteenth-century French terms, which are without modern associations.

One typical (and detailed) nineteenth-century French conception of *névrose* occurs in Henri Frémineau's 1875 book *Névroses et névralgies essentielles*:

Les névroses sont des maladies qui ont leur siège dans le système nerveux.

Elles sont caractérisées par des troubles fonctionnels, sans lésions

apparentes. Les névroses sont généralement de longue durée, apyrétiques,

avec apparence de symptômes graves, sans toutefois être dangereuses ...

Les névroses peuvent frapper les organes du sentiment aussi bien que ceux

du mouvement; troubler les fonctions intellectuelles; atteindre isolément  
un ou plusieurs ensemble de ces organes ou de ces fonctions (Frémineau

3)

Though *névrose* includes multiple conditions, several general characteristics stand out: there are functional difficulties without obvious physical sources; the condition is long-term; and it includes both physical and mental disturbances. Other authors delineate similar symptoms; the set of symptoms “se compose *principalement* de phénomènes qui indiquent une exaltation, un affaiblissement ou une perversion des fonctions intellectuelles, sensibles ou motrices” (Axenfeld and Huchard 15 (emphasis in original)). Again, it is apparently typical to see a combination of physical, mental, and hallucinatory disturbances. They can include “névroses des fonctions nutritives” (Brochin 739); “des troubles de la sensibilité générale; des troubles des sensibilités spéciales et sensorielles” (742); more specifically, as Dechambre notes, “La sensibilité peut être altérée de trois manières, par excès ..., par absence ou diminution ... ou par perversion.” (Brochin 742). In focusing on sensory and emotional symptoms that display excess, absence, or perversion, Dechambre provides an important link between *névrose* and the idea of a pathological conception of reality that is neither dictated by authority nor created whole by the sufferer. Instead, what we might term “alternative reality” is at issue. For *névrosés*, perceptions of the outside world are filtered through the patient’s abnormal senses and a lack of proportionality in judgement. To place this condition in the context of the incompatibility between empirical reality and reality as the sufferer misinterprets it, I will use the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ .

The *névrosés* of *fin de siècle* France by nature looked for certainty in their world of hysteria and hesitancy. In the narratives *À Rebours* and *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* the *névrosé* protagonists search for certainty in an “altered” state of reality, in the first case via aesthetics and in the second via the acceptance of a hallucinatory state. These are deliberate choices to enter a state beyond “normal;” in such a state, the *névrose* is absent and, paradoxically, the sufferer is certain that he can overcome or dismiss the types of typical *névrosé* problems that are frequent in empirical reality. Huysmans and Lorrain’s protagonists demonstrate (and develop) an alteration of sensibilities which is both sensory perversion and an excess of sensibility.

The authors have their protagonists fixate on the elimination of *névrose* (and therefore the acquisition of certainty) via the exploration of altered reality; thus, the philosophical pair that characterizes Huysmans’ and Lorrain’s protagonists is the aforementioned  $\frac{\text{alteration of reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ .

Given that *À Rebours* and “Les Contes d'un buveur d'éther” contain different though related paths to alteration of reality, one must seek the fundamental similarities between the methods of the two protagonists, and similarities of the characters’ goals. There are two principal correspondences: the futility and the excess with which Huysmans and Lorrain imbue their protagonists’ search for certainty. The futility results from the authors’ repetition of the protagonists’ attempts at revealing the superior nature of their alternative reality and their equally short-lived renunciations of particular aesthetic or chemical efforts to impose such on empirical reality. The other similarity, excess, is in effect the most accurate way of representing alteration of reality because it is the essential “method” of these characters to obtain an altered reality. “Excess” is related to futility in



that the character goes to disproportionate lengths to achieve his goal without result, via either overwrought aesthetics or consistent drug-taking. Excess is one of the characteristics of *névrosés* mentioned by Dechambre, and the hallucinations and practical quandaries in everyday life that Huysmans and Lorrain create for their protagonists are clear examples of excess warping the perceptions and reactions of these characters.

#### AN UNNATURAL AESTHETE – *À REBOURS*

In discussing Huysmans' *À Rebours*, I shall begin by elucidating the specific type of *névrose* that the author attributes to his protagonist: *névrose hystérique*. I shall also at this point discuss possible misinterpretation of this term. I shall then explore the narrative voice and point of view as formulated by the author in the context of alternative reality and proceed to an examination of the particular excesses Huysmans limns for his protagonist des Esseintes. Finally, I shall discuss how these excesses help to define des Esseintes' alternative reality and its incongruity with empirical reality.

Huysmans attributes a preoccupation with *outré* aesthetics to his protagonist Jean des Esseintes that encapsulates the phenomena of excess in search of certainty, as well as his pursuit of a cure for mental disturbances in devotion to alternative reality. Huysmans formulates des Esseintes as a sufferer from *névrose* in the form of what late-nineteenth century psychologists referred to as *névrose hystérique* (Marquer 70); though popular post-Freud usage associates the term “hystérique” with women, contemporary French psychology had a strong tradition of masculine hysteria. The prominent psychologist/neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot was, as Misha Kavka points out, the “great French theorist of (male and female) hysterics” (116). Charcot himself insisted consistently that it was entirely possible for a man to suffer from this condition (Marquer

65). Des Esseintes, as designed by the author, would fit easily into this category.

Huysmans suggests the possibility that des Esseintes' *névrose hystérique* may underlie the protagonist's tendency towards excess in his search for certainty. The author has his protagonist search merely generic aesthetics, but a surprising number of permutations of bizarre or unusual versions which are frequently unnatural.

Huysmans informs his readers of des Esseintes' actions and emotional states largely through an undramatized and seemingly bland third-person narrative voice. This narrative voice at times glances inside the mind of the principal character, relating his memories and mental processes. The ostensibly uncritical and objective narrative voice can give clues to des Esseintes' *névrose* and help the reader define the protagonist's alternative reality and his approach to it; Huysmans has the narrative voice use subtle diction and ironic juxtaposition in his unobtrusive characterization of his protagonist. The author establishes this narrative voice in his prefatory "Notice" to the reader, outlining the des Esseintes family history; to fashion this history, Huysmans creates images of the protagonist's ancestors for his narrative voice to describe to the reader. From this "Notice," the audience knows before the first chapter that even beyond his personal indulgences in excess, des Esseintes already has a hereditary predisposition to the same. The portraits that Huysmans invents for the protagonist's family gallery are in chronological order and painted in dissimilar styles; this progression allows him to build the assumed characteristics of his protagonist through hereditary layers, displaying their subjects' immoderation and, via the narrative voices' descriptions, hinting at the protagonist's emotional and mental pathologies. The earliest that they are "rebarbatifs reîtres" who, with their "forts épaules," "armaient avec leurs yeux fixes, leurs

moustaches en yatagans, leur poitrine dont l'arc bombé remplissait l'énorme coquille des cuirasses" (Huysmans 61). Thus, the author's narrative voice exposes an excessive violence in the family's past, signaling that these remote ancestors were of barbarous and physically threatening appearance with probable military backgrounds and a disturbed sense of sensibility. In fact, Huysmans' narrative voice describes these individuals directly as *soudards* and *reîtres* and associates them with military items: their mustaches resemble swords (*yatagans*) and they are wearing cuirasses. The narrative voice's description of a later portrait signals another form of excess and perversion (in this case, of sensuality and sexuality); this des Esseintes is not a fighting duke, but an effete courtier displaying qualities that are nearly decadent. In this image of a Renaissance ancestor of his protagonist, Huysmans included signs of extravagant weakness, indecision, and falsity. According to the narrative voice, this particular des Esseintes appears "mystérieuse et rusé" and phlegmatic (too much lymph); he is haggard, his features "morts et tirés;" he displays thinned blood and a loss of virility (61). The Renaissance duke was indubitably excessive and lived a life tainted with alternative reality; as Huysmans includes in his narrative voice's commentary, this individual was an intimate of several favorites of Henri III's notably outrageous court, such as the duc d'Épernon and the marquis d'O. In regards to Huysmans's own protagonist, the *fin de siècle* des Esseintes, the author creates a characterization that makes it clear that the hereditary line has become weakened through decadence (closely related to excess and perversion) and intermarriage: "les des Esseintes marièrent, pendant deux siècles, leurs enfants entre eux, usant leur reste de vigueur dans les unions consanguines." Late-nineteenth century psychologists considered inbreeding a source of mental and emotional

pathologies: as the famous Théodule Ribot noted only ten years later, “Dès que cette somme de vitalité et d’aptitudes commence à s’affaiblir, la déchéance commence” (Ribot 194). Consanguine marriages, whether in fiction or reality, evidently lead to endemic pathology according to the French psychologists of the time.

According to the author’s narrative voice, the protagonist’s immediate family was no exception to this hereditary degeneration; his father died from a “vague maladie” and his mother herself suffered from long-term *névrose* (62). Through his narrative voice, Huysmans describes his protagonist’s juvenile thoughts and experiences: “Son enfance avait été funèbre ... Il n’avait gardé de ses parents qu’un souvenir apeuré, sans reconnaissance, sans affection” (62). This childhood was not merely gloomy but lacking as well any familial warmth from his debilitated parents. Once des Esseintes goes to a Jesuit school, however, he finds a more congenial alternative to the dreary dysfunction of empirical reality, the reality of the priests: “Chez les jésuites ... son existence fut plus bienveillante et plus douce” (62); though his enthusiasm for the school wanes, his devotion to Latin, French and (more importantly) theology remains.

Il vécut ainsi, parfaitement heureux, sentant à peine le joug paternel des prêtres; il continua ses études latines et françaises à sa guise, et, encore que la théologie ne figurât pas dans les programmes de ses classes, il compléta l’apprentissage de cette science. (63-64)

After his years with the Jesuits, however, des Esseintes ends up entering contemporary society: “Peu à peu, ... il approcha les hommes de lettres avec lesquels sa pensée devait rencontrer plus d’affinités et se sentir mieux à l’aise” (64). Society, however, revolts him: “il démura révolté par leurs jugements rancuniers et mesquins, par leur conversation

aussi banale qu'une porte d'église, par leurs dégoûtantes discussions..." (65). In Huysmans' formulation, des Esseintes' latent *névrose* develops because of this revulsion and scorn. The narrative voice characterizes this burgeoning condition with physical and sensory details: "Enervé, mal à l'aise, il devenait comme ces gens dont a parlé Nicole, qui sont douloureux partout; il en arrivait à s'écorcher constamment l'épiderme" (65) .

Huysmans' inclusion of phantom pain and tactile hallucinations in the catalogue of symptoms he creates for his protagonist reflect the physical effects of *névrose*'s sensory distortions and provides an example of how such a pathology can override empirical reality for the sufferer. Though des Esseintes attempts to remedy his condition via a common distraction, womanizing, his *névrose* persists: "Quoi qu'il tentât, un immense ennui l'opprimait. ... sa santé faiblit et son système nerveux s'exacerba" (66). The narrative voice thus expands the range of the pathology's observable aspects, adding weariness and oversensitivity to the physical effects noted earlier. In the situation created by the author, doctors have no effect on the protagonist's condition; Huysmans establishes this to provide a motive for des Esseintes to entertain the idea of a true alternative reality: he decides to flee to a world that he himself can define: "Ses idées de se blotter, loin du monde, de se calfeutrer dans une retraite, d'assourdir ... le vacarme roulant de l'inflexible vie, se renforcèrent" (67). In pursuit of goal of retreating from "inflexible" empirical reality, the protagonist fixes on the choice of a remote chateau, Fontenay, where he can be certain of finding relief in "la nouvelle existence qu'il voulait organiser" (67) . For the rest of the narrative, the author continues to have des Esseintes alternate between his loathing of society and consequent *névrose* and the his generally unsuccessful attempts to escape into alternative reality.

In Chapter 1, the “real” beginning of the novel, Huysmans’ representation of des Esseintes’ flight from reality continues in a depth of detail that is almost extravagant. The narrative voice presents an exhaustive panoply of the protagonist’s efforts at Fontenay to create his alternative reality; by the sheer *bizarrierie* with which the author endows his protagonist’s conception of this alternative reality, he reveals an inherent desperation in des Esseintes’ attempts to escape the empirical world. Huysmans has des Esseintes zigzag among a variety of deliberately *outré* aesthetic preoccupations, both before and after his move to Fontenay. The narrative voice provides an account of previous eccentric behavior as recalled by des Esseintes a little over two months before he flees to Fontenay; the anecdotes related by the narrative voice highlight the protagonist’s use of eccentric aesthetics in pursuit of alternative reality (69-71) . To reinforce the connections between *névrose*, art, and the pursuit of alternative reality, the author has the narrative voice inform the reader that des Esseintes had dipped into extreme aesthetic excursions when “il jugeait nécessaire de se singulariser.” According to the narrative voice’s account of the protagonist’s attempts to stand out from the rest of society, i.e. those who dwell in empirical reality, des Esseintes indulges in such idiosyncrasies as the creation of “fastueusement étranges” furnishings corresponding to particular works of literature (70) . Unsurprisingly, when the protagonist lauds “dandysme” from the pulpit that forms part of his unique décor imitating the interior of a Catholic church, and does so wearing a white velvet suit with a border common to church vestments, he acquires a reputation as an eccentric (70) . This is, of course, a reputation that mirrors vision of himself that the author created for his protagonist, an individual living in his own alternative reality. With the narrative voice’s relation of such

anecdotes, Huysmans emphasizes des Esseintes' desire to cultivate alternative reality and his failure to use it to overwhelm the empirical universe: "... ces extravagances dont il se glorifiait jadis [before his move to Fontenay] s'étaient, d'elles-mêmes, consumés; aujourd'hui, le mépris lui était venu de ces ostentations puériles et surannées..." (71). The narrative voice, speaking for des Esseintes, implies that he gave up his ridiculous "extravagances" only once he found them to have guttered out, useless. Huysmans formulated his protagonist as, *au fond*, an erratic dilettante. He cannot continue with one single self-conscious eccentricity; he feels a continuous compulsion to be ever more fantastic.

Once des Esseintes moves to Fontenay, the narrative voice relates that the protagonist is now simply pursuing his own personal pleasure rather than "l'étonnement des autres;" Huysmans undermines this characterization of des Esseintes, having his protagonist persist in his desire to create an unusually bedecked décor, "se façonner une installation curieuse et calme, appropriée aux besoins de sa future solitude" (71) . In such an isolated setting, des Esseintes' alteration of reality can fully bloom. The protagonist's *lubies* include an extensive range of aesthetic fixations. At first, he becomes obsessed with color, its variations and *associations*. In a close focus on the protagonist, the narrative voice relays his perorations on tone and hue of colors, and their emotional content, as well as his derision of ordinary men's perceptions: :

... le commun des hommes dont les grossières rétines ne perçoivent ni le cadence propre à chacun des couleurs, ni le charme mystérieux de leurs dégradations et de leurs nuances; ... ces yeux bourgeois, insensibles à la pompe et à la victoire des teintes vibrantes et fortes (73)

The narrative voice portrays des Esseintes' subtle reinforcement of his self-imagined status as an individual of superior perception, imagining the struggle between colors as loosely parallel to that between genius<sup>55</sup> and banality. In this way, Huysmans uses his narrative voice to suggest his protagonist's preference for his alternative reality and his justification via aesthetics for rejecting empirical reality. The vocabulary that the narrative voice uses to convey des Esseintes' descriptions and over-interpretation of the attributes of various colors and their influence on perception and emotional state. The narrative voice relates the protagonist's claims that salmon, corn, and rose colors cause effeminacy, with the result that they block feelings of isolation; in contrast, des Esseintes insists that violet tones are denuded and useless. After sneering at *lie-de-vin* reds he suggests that the only three colors that are worth contemplation by his unique nature are pure red, orange, and yellow:

À toutes, il préférerait l'orange, confirmant ainsi par son propre exemple ...  
une harmonie existe entre la nature sensuelle d'un individu vraiment  
artiste et la couleur que ses yeux voient d'une façon plus spéciale et plus  
vive. (Huysmans 72-73)

The protagonist's aesthetic preferences as the narrative voice prove that only "un individu vraiment artiste" can appreciate the subtleties and import of certain significant hues and

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<sup>55</sup> The protagonist's extensive reflections on colors and their dubious implications may recall to readers Rimbaud's poem "Les Voyelles." It is definitely debatable whether or not Huysmans ever read the sonnet. In his 1903 preface to *À Rebours*, Huysmans declared that "Arthur Rimbaud et Jules Laforgue eussent mérité de figurer dans le florilège de des Esseintes, mais ils n'avaient rien encore rien imprimé à cette époque-là et ce n'est que plus tard que leurs oeuvres ont paru" Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *À rebours*. edited by Pierre Waldner, Garnier-Flammarion, 1978. *Garnier-Flammarion*, vol. 298.. This is an evidently false assertion. Rimbaud originally published *Les Voyelles* in 1883, so it is technically possible for Huysmans to have read it, though he had not yet met Verlaine, who was to become a close friend.



use them as to partly define his individual alternative reality. Huysmans uses the the narrative voice to demonstrate how des Esseintes' preference for orange tints proves his effeminately aesthetic nature. As des Esseintes insists via the narrative voice, "les solides mâles ... ceux-là se complaisant, pour la plupart, aux lueurs éclatantes des jaunes et des rouges" while "les yeux des gens affaiblis et nerveux ... gens surexcités étiques chérissent, presque tous, cette couleur irritante et malade, aux splendeurs fictives, aux fièvres acides: l'orangé" (73). By having the narrative voice characterize des Esseintes' opinions in this fashion, Huysmans suggests that only someone "affaiblis et nerveux" – and therefore a creator of an alternate reality – can show true aesthetic sense and interpret specific colors.

After des Esseintes' self-conscious musings on colors, the Huysmans has the narrative voice portray the protagonist's arrival at the essence of a desire for an altered reality. As part of his interior decorating, des Esseintes includes three pieces by Baudelaire set in pride of place upon his mantel: two sonnets ("La Mort des Amants" and "l'Ennemi") and, of supreme importance, Baudelaire's prose poem "*any where out of the world*" – "N'import où hors du monde" (Huysmans 75, punctuation in original) . This is, of course, virtually the definition of the alternative reality that Huysmans has des Esseintes pursue in purchasing Fontenay: the château is, metaphorically, somewhere "out of the world" – that is, the world of empirical reality. The narrative voice conveys the pathos of this moment in the protagonist's life; in his brain-fevered state, des Esseintes may not know the where or what of Baudelaire's alternative reality, but he longs for it nevertheless. With this first full chapter, Huysmans sets the stage for des Esseintes continuing search for his own alternative reality "any where out of the world."

While the audience might wonder because of this reference if Huysmans is portraying the protagonist as a mirror of Baudelaire, this is a false equivalence. Des Esseintes' yearnings notwithstanding, the narrative voice suggests that the protagonist is beyond Baudelaire; the poet was a reflection of his own society, not necessarily a departure from it. Huysmans most likely used Baudelaire as an inspiration for des Esseintes rather than a model; the protagonist, as the author fashioned him, is even more steeped in excess than the poet. In des Esseintes, Huysmans created a character who has no truck with contemporary society or culture; in the narrative voice's relation of des Esseintes' reaction to his urban *milieu*; he wants to "se soustraire à une haïssable époque d'indigne muflements..." and decided to immerse himself in the aesthetic past "après s'être désintéressé de l'existence contemporaine" (104). According to the narrative voice, the protagonist finds the empirical reality of late-nineteenth century life revolting yet boring. Even after moving to his alternative world – his isolated chateau – des Esseintes is unable to find a cure for his *névrose* and associated boredom: "[M]alheureusement, les moyens de dompter l'inexorable maladie manquèrent... Son ennui devint sans bornes" (142). The narrative voice suggests that purely physical separation is not sufficient for des Esseintes; once more, the author gives evidence through the narrative voice's characterizations that des Esseintes must combine an alteration of his physical surroundings with an outrageous change in his mental and emotional perception of culture and beauty.

Perhaps des Esseintes' most glaring and essentially affected attempt to alter reality occurs in the second chapter. Huysmans has des Esseintes turn his dining room into an unlikely and elaborate simulacrum of a ship's cabin, including a false gun port (77). In a

detail of aesthetic *dédoublement* of altered reality that is either disturbed or incredibly arch, des Esseintes includes an aquarium in his pseudo ship's cabin. When the narrative voice relates des Esseintes' seagoing costuming of his dining room, the reader sees how the protagonist goes to farcical lengths to create an alternative reality. Ironically, the room's overelaborate decorating suggests the unconvincing nature of the attempted alteration. The author has des Esseintes fantasize that he sees mechanical fish swimming by his windows/portholes and smells tar that "insufflait dans la pièce, avant qu'il y entrât;" he indulges a compulsion to examine the color engravings of Lloyd's steamboats and the routes of Royal Mail steam packets, among other nautical fetishes (78). The narrative voice also relates how the protagonist either hallucinates or, more probably, insists to himself that he perceives all the odors and sounds typical of nautical *milieux* (78). The narrative voice explains des Esseintes' labored and forced imposition upon empirical reality of his wildly artificial world:

Il se procurait ainsi, en ne bougeant point, les sensations rapides, presque instantanées, d'un voyage au long cours, et ce plaisir du déplacement qui n'existe, en somme, que par le souvenir et presque jamais dans le présent.  
(78-79)

Des Esseintes' hunger for sensations and impressions of a reality that does not correspond to empirical reality induces him to search his memories and fantasies, ignoring the present and his actual life and circumstances; his alternative reality is, in some aspects, more true than the empirical world.

Having previously had the narrative voice give his audience a sympathetic description of the protagonist's desire to change reality, the author now presents the

reader with a *névrosé* version of the same impulse to replace empirical reality with an alternative reality. The preoccupations and self-delusion in Huysmans' formulation of des Esseintes emphasizes the character's *névrose* and the way in which the protagonist reinterprets this condition as extraordinary artistic creativity rather than aesthetic delusion. This contrast has additional support in several statements by the narrative voice that are direct assertions of the protagonist's need to twist the ordinary universe; these statements also indicate how extraordinary and unique des Esseintes' perverse view of his efforts in this regard: "l'imagination lui semblait pouvoir aisément suppléer à la vulgaire réalité des faits" (79). The narrative voice thus provides des Esseintes' commentary on the need for aesthetic sensibilities to make empirical reality bearable. The narrative voice proceeds to reveal the protagonist's attitude toward the relationship between genius and alternative reality: "l'artifice paraissait à des Esseintes la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme" (80). For des Esseintes as Huysmans created him, the artificial and the exceptional are identical. Near the beginning of the second chapter, the narrative voice describes another musing by the protagonist that demonstrates his conflation of aesthetics, alternative reality, and mental pathology:

il avait voulu, pour la délectation de son esprit et la joie de ses yeux,  
quelques oeuvres suggestives, le jetant dans un monde inconnu, lui  
dévoilant les traces de nouvelles conjectures, lui ébranlant le système  
nerveux par d'érudites hystéries (104)

Here, Huysmans once more uses the narrative voice to give the reader evidence of the *névrose* that he incorporated into des Esseintes; the protagonist craves artistic satisfaction, but is equally attracted to the possibilities of a new, aesthetic reality and sees

no reason to disdain such works because they carry *névrose* with them. He has an emphatic belief in the superiority of his own aesthetic sensibilities, but also appears to acknowledge the possibility that he might suffer from a mental pathology, although he implies that the last is the result of diving into aesthetic reality rather than being both a consequence and a source of the alternative reality connected to *névrose*. Huysmans creates a protagonist who must maintain his belief in his own innate uniqueness and the consequent superiority of his alternative aesthetic reality, yet who simultaneously must recognize the presence of *névrose* in his existence even as he searches for a cure for his condition.

Briefly setting aside his protagonist's aesthetic obsession with visual phenomena such as color, the narrative voice describes a self-consciously synesthetic experience on the part of des Esseintes: his so-called "orgue à bouche." Echoing Brochin's description of the sensory distortion common in *névrose*, this mechanical contrivance combines the physical experience of taste with an imaginary auditory experience: "[il] arrivait à se procurer, dans le gosier, des sensations analogues à celles que la musique verse à les oreilles" (99). By having his protagonist amuse himself with such a device, the author can again explore the character's pursuit of alternative reality in an aesthetic context. The "orgue à bouche" is essentially a liquor shelf with spigots and tubing connected to a pipe organ such that the protagonist can dispense whatever liqueur he associates with a particular instrument. While composing one of his synesthetic symphonies, Huysmans has des Esseintes claim that "le curaço sec" is a clarinet, while gin and whiskey are equivalent to brass instruments such as the trombone (99-100). The protagonist's deliberate invocation of sensory confusion carries a hint of perversity, indicating a

deliberate effort on his part to impose an alternative reality on the empirical world. In stark contrast to the preference he has just demonstrated in *des Esseintes* for existing in alternative reality, the narrative persona then switches abruptly to a recounting of the protagonist's memory of his last toothache. Through its utterly prosaic nature, a toothache embodies empirical reality. The contrast Huysmans creates for *des Esseintes* between *outré* aesthetic synesthesia and a common and banal physical affliction is glaring; the protagonist's solution to his condition, as reported by the narrative voice, is an example of empirical reality defeating alternative reality on the physical plane. rather than visit a true dentist, Huysmans has his protagonist visit a common and cheap tooth practitioner whose expertise lies more or less in brutal extractions.

Il se décida à aller chez le premier venu, à courir chez un quenottier du peuple, un de ces gens à poigne de fer qui, s'ils ignorant l'art bien inutile d'ailleurs de panser les caries et d'obturer les trous, savent extirper, avec une rapidité sans pareille, les chicots les plus tenaces; chez ceux-là, c'est ouvert au petit jour et l'on n'attend pas. (101)

There is a mundane reason for *des Esseintes'* choice – he has put off treating his toothache until a near-immediate remedy is necessary. Beyond this motivation, however, the narrative voice's phrasing (e.g., “du peuple;” “poigne de fer”) carries the inescapable suggestion that *des Esseintes* is choosing a practitioner despite his own ideology of rejecting the practical and widespread in favor of the aesthetic and artificial. In Huysman's formulation, the exigencies of the empirical universe force the protagonist into a particularly unpleasant departure from his *névrosé* alternative reality:

Un craquement s'était fait entendre, la molaire se cassait, en venant; il lui  
avait alors semblé qu'on lui arrachait la tête, qu'on lui fracassait le crâne;  
il avait perdu la raison, avait hurlé de toutes ses forces, s'était  
furieusement défendu contre l'homme qui se ruait de nouveau sur lui  
(102)

In one way, the author's decision to make des Esseintes' tooth extraction so traumatic, and the dentist so cruel, justifies the protagonist's rejection of empirical reality with all its associated weakness and pain; in another way, however, the brutality of the tooth extraction demonstrates the bankruptcy of attempting to live in an alternative reality. As Huysmans constructs this scenario, des Esseintes would not have had to experience the violence and agony of the procedure had he not earlier refused to accept the exasperation and bother of acknowledging the bodily weakness inherent in empirical reality.

Given the protagonist's changeable, even capricious, nature that the reader can observe in des Esseintes' vacillation between hewing to his alternative reality and engaging the real world, it is predictable that des Esseintes will be unable to sustain his intense focus on aesthetics and synesthesia. This is, in fact, the case. Later, the narrative voice reports an extensive interlude in which des Esseintes turns to the aesthetics of a perverted horticultural ideal. While gardening – or horticulture – often expresses a desire to reproduce nature in what is frequently an artificial environment, des Esseintes forces an alteration of reality by taking the opposite goal: he explicitly pursues a vision of the natural that imitates the unnatural. His “penchant naturel vers l'artifice” leads the protagonist to the idea that “il voulait des fleurs naturelles imitant des fleurs fausses” (133). This horticultural aesthetic inversion exemplifies all of des Esseintes' efforts, as

formulated by Huysmans, to replace empirical reality with his own altered version of the same. To put this phenomenon in the context of the passage, in the protagonist's alternative reality, nature becomes artificial; imposed artificiality is, in fact, the essence of fundamental truth. In this episode, the narration switches from the narrative voice to a direct quotation of the protagonist, emphasizing the essential importance of perverted aesthetics in des Esseintes' alternative reality:

il est vrai que la plupart du temps la nature est, à elle seule, incapable de procréer des espèces aussi malsaines et aussi perverses ; elle fournit la matière première, le germe et le sol, la matrice nourricière et les éléments de la plante que l'homme élève, modèle, peint, sculpte ensuite à sa guise.

(137)

The character's stated preference for those botanical examples that are repugnant and, in fact, "à rebours," is effectively an exhibition of excess disguised as aesthetics and the triumph of humanity over chaos. The narrative voice also deepens the intensity of the protagonist's perversion of reality by relating des Esseintes' introduction the metaphor of syphilis in connection to his unnatural flowers and, by extension, to the near totality of human existence:

Tout n'est que syphilis, songea des Esseintes, l'œil attiré, rivé sur les horribles tigrures des Caladium que caressait un rayon de jour. Et il eut la brusque vision d'une humanité sans cesse travaillée par le virus des anciens âges ... l'éternelle maladie qui a ravagé les ancêtres de l'homme, qui a creusé jusqu'aux os maintenant exhumés des vieux fossiles (137)



The comparison that the author has his protagonist offer is tenuous at best, and reveals more about des Esseintes' mental and emotional pathologies than it does about horticulture in general. The Caladium, which the author chooses to have his protagonist mention specifically is an irritant-producing plant with prominent veins (Allaby). There is little specific connection between this plant and syphilis; the symptomatic characterization of the latter is very different from des Esseintes' description of Caladium (as related by the narrative voice):

se manifestant toujours à son début, lorsqu'elle est acquise, par un chancre induré ou infectant, puis par des adénopathies [abnormal lymph nodes], par des éruptions de la peau et des muqueuses, plus tard par des inflammations chroniques du tissu cellulo-vasculaire et des os, et enfin par des productions spéciales en forme de petites tumeurs ou nodules qui ont reçu le nom de gommes syphilitiques (Rollet 290)

When Huysmans has his protagonist compare the two, the only commonalities that the reader can be certain of are the harmfulness, ugliness, and persistence. The author thus highlights his protagonist's overwhelming and deliberate denial of common standards and obsession with propounding any outstandingly contradictory opinion, a constant and characteristic tendency of Huysman's *névrosé* main character as he pursues his self-conscious idiosyncratic alternative reality.

Aesthetics are an inevitable and explicit part of des Esseintes' attempts to flee prosaic, empirical reality. The author elucidates his protagonist's escapist tendencies through characterizations related by the narrative voice:

son besoin d'échapper à l'horrible réalité de l'existence, à franchir les  
confins de la pensée, à tâtonner sans jamais arriver à une certitude , dans  
les brumes des au-delà des arts (149)

Des Esseintes finds empirical reality not only repugnant in general, but limiting to thought as well. It is ironic that here the narrative voice suggests that the protagonist wants to avoid the possibility of certainty; in this context, however, Huysmans' narrative voice implies that certainty is limited to the certainty des Esseintes considers inherent in empirical reality. The author has his protagonist immerse himself in an eternal search for escape from empirical reality, an escape that can only exist in his alternative reality. from the common people that he despises. Huysmans fashioned the novel's protagonist to use aesthetics use this as a means of altering those elements of empirical reality that he finds particularly disturbing. The narrator details other aesthetic efforts by des Esseintes to alter empirical reality to reflect his alternative reality; like horticulture, these are more applied arts than decorative arts. He cycles through such means of self-expression as perfumery and of paper-making. Huysmans' formulation of des Esseintes' opinions on perfumery in particular demonstrates the protagonist's predilection for perverse aesthetics, aesthetics that are meant to alter reality:

il n'était pas, en somme, plus anormal qu'un art existât, en dégageant  
d'odorantes fluides ... Dans cet art des parfums, un côté l'avait, entre  
tous, séduit, celui de la précision factice (153)

The narrative voice once again emphasizes des Esseintes' fascination with sensory distortion and manipulation, now with the sense of smell. He once again associates art, abnormality, and artificiality in a rejection of true nature in favor of an alternative reality.

As the novel progresses, Huysmans intensifies the incongruity between Des Esseintes' personal reality and the empirical world, expressed by the philosophical pair alteration of reality / empirical reality. Particularly vivid examples of this intensification occur in the narrative voice's descriptions aesthetically perfect but imaginary voyages that the protagonist uses to supplant reality and to deny the consequences of his self-isolation. He pretends to take a trip to London that in actuality is simply a voyage to an "English" club in Paris (163-172), thus again forcing elements of empirical reality into his own desired reality in order to banish his *névrose*. Significantly, at first Des Esseintes does not seem to necessarily realize that his voyage will be illusory (163); whether this is fantasy or confusion is unclear. In either case, he has his bags packed for a trip of unknown duration: "des Esseintes prescrivit qu'on lui apprêtât ses malles, pour un long voyage" (163) in order to alleviate the *névrose* that he himself indicates has returned in spite of – or even perhaps because of – his decision to isolate himself:

Une fois de plus, cette solitude si ardemment enviée et enfin acquise, avait abouti à une détresse affreuse; ce silence qui lui était autrefois apparu comme une compensation des sottises écoutées pendant des ans, lui pesait maintenant d'un poids insoutenable. (164-165)

Here, Huysmans introduces a seemingly contradictory element to his protagonist's character; it appears that Des Esseintes is rejecting his own alternative reality. Des Esseintes' feelings as described by the narrative voice are actually ambiguous. Solitude is only one element of the protagonist's alternative reality, and the rejection of one element does not invalidate the whole (164). The narrative voice reveals the arrogance of

the protagonist's conviction that he can manipulate outside reality by use of an explicitly artificial journey:

peu à peu, dans ces contemplations fictives, s'insinuèrent des idées de  
réalité précise, de voyage accompli, de rêves vérifiés sur lesquels se greffa  
l'envie d'éprouver des impressions neuves et d'échapper ainsi aux  
épuisantes débauches de l'esprit s'étourdissant à moudre à vide. (163)

It is evident that des Esseintes is capable of recognizing reality ("des idées de la réalité précise ... de rêves vérifiés") even while feeling the necessity to adulterate it – or rather to accord it status only insofar as he can submerge it in his own aesthetic ("l'envie d'éprouver des impressions neuves") and his own desperation for a cure of his *névrose* ("échapper ainsi aux épuisantes débauchés de l'esprit"). Nevertheless, through the narrative voice Huysmans conveys to the reader that des Esseintes is blind to the distinction between empirical reality and his aesthetic fantasies. Rather than journeying to London itself, des Esseintes substitutes a bar/club he calls English that, to him, distills the essential artistry of the English character. As described by the narrative voice, this purportedly authentic piece of Old England (named, unexpectedly, "Le Bodega") incorporates a number of conventions and *lieux communs* that des Esseintes uses in the creation of his alternative reality. These include varieties of alcohol; stereotypical figures of physically and sartorially repugnant clergymen; pompously chatting Englishmen; and various characters from Dickens (169-170). The narrative voice suggests that there is no contradiction between the sensations of physical travel and those of his imaginary alternative; though the protagonist still contemplates a real voyage, the fantasy of

England combined with at least superficial elements of the real England in truth suffices for des Esseintes, in part due to the nature of his *névrose*:

À quoi bon bouger, quand on peut voyager si magnifiquement sur une chaise? N'était-il pas à Londres dont les senteurs, dont l'atmosphère, dont les habitants, dont les pâtures, dont les ustensiles, l'environnaient? ... une immense aversion pour le voyage, un impérieux besoin de rester tranquille s'imposaient avec une volonté de plus en plus accusée, de plus en plus tenace (174)

The narrative voice then directly quotes the protagonist, who remarks in this same vein:

En somme, j'ai éprouvé et j'ai vu ce que je voulais éprouver et voir ... il faudrait être fou pour aller perdre, par un maladroit déplacement, d'impérissables sensations. (174)

Des Esseintes' combination of physical enervation and intellectual obsession with what he calls "sensation" favors his acceptance of a symbolic, aestheticized reality in place of its empirical counterpart. Huysmans does not fashion this symbol-dependent alternative reality or his protagonist's subsequent exploration of literary aesthetics as an answer or a cure for his des Esseintes' pathology. Instead, the author continues his formulation of des Esseintes as a *névrosé* who fails in his efforts to eliminate the more unpleasant aspects of his condition. The narrative voice notes the connection of these symptoms to *névrose*: "Semblable à tous les gens tourmentés par la névrose, la chaleur l'écrasait; l'anémie, maintenue par le froid, reprenait son cours, affaiblissant le corps débilité par d'abondantes sueurs" (194-195). Des Esseintes has frequently demonstrated sensorial and mental signs of *névrose*, and now he exhibits its physical symptoms as well.

Though the protagonist had previously used a particular wine (Constantina from J.-P. Cloete) to some salutary effect on his stomach and energy, it fails him now as does the Russian liqueur Nalifka “ce cordial, d’ordinaire si fidèle, échoua ... ce sirop onctueux et framboisé fut, lui aussi, inefficace” (200). The narrative voice generalizes about all alcoholic treatments : “Ces remèdes n’agissent malheureusement plus, depuis que ses maux devenaient réels” (200). The narrative voice’s reference to the pro, it seems that these remedies had worked to relieve some of the symptoms of *névrose*, but only when the symptoms were due to the perversion of des Esseintes’ intelligent and emotional faculties. The narrative voice’s reference to the protagonist’s unfortunate experiments with other drugs merely reinforces Des Esseinte’s desire to flee his physical problems by escaping into his alternative reality and his inability to do so:

Jadis, il avait voulu se procurer avec l’opium et le haschisch des visions,  
mais ces deux substances avaient amené des vomissements et des  
perturbations nerveuses intenses (200)

Des Esseintes claims that his goal in taking such substances was to induce visions, but that all he experienced was nausea and nervous perturbations. Huysmans thus created a situation in which the protagonist can only separate himself from empirical reality by encouraging the mental and sensory distortions originating in his *névrose* itself. There is a certain artificial quality to this determined simulation of hallucination, highly typical of his various aesthetic eccentricities. The narrative voice relates that des Esseintes, lacking effective mind-altering substances, must rely on imagination and fantasy. Here, the author introduces an echo of the earlier allusion to a Baudelaire and “Anywhere out of the world.” There is a logical connection between life and the world around us.

According to the narrative voice, life – that is, existence in the world of empirical reality – is in direct opposition to dreams, which are part of alternative reality.

By this point, it is evident that the excess in the  $\frac{\text{excess}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  is a collection of individual attempts at alteration or suppression of reality. Huysmans formulates these around the protagonist's conception of aesthetics and his experiences of *névrose*; thus, the narrative voice continues to relate instances of des Esseintes' individual aesthetic excesses through the last chapters of the novel. The author has his protagonist turn to poetry near the end of the narrative, mentioning authors such as Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Baudelaire, and Poe who were fascinated by mental disorders. Though literary obsession is an inherently less dangerous form of excess than drug use, the narrative voice does not describe any relief from *névrose* for des Esseintes in these works, but rather relates the exacerbation of the protagonist's mentally perturbed state:

mais maintenant que sa névrose s'était exaspérée, il y avait des jours où  
ces lectures le brisaient, des jours où il restait, les mains tremblantes,  
l'oreille au guet, se sentant, ainsi que le désolant Usher, envahi par une  
transe irraisonnée, par une frayeur sourde. (216)

In Huysmans' delineation of the protagonist's efforts to eliminate the empirical signs of *névrose*, the author uses his narrative voice to reveal the counter-productive nature of des Esseintes' attempts. The narrative voice has already demonstrated that literature is an important element of the main character's quest for alternative reality; nevertheless, Huysmans incorporates a perverse relationship between the study of literature and episodes of *névrose* into his protagonist's mental pathology. The narrative voice describes a vicious circle composed of these two phenomena; when the *névrose* is mild,

des Esseintes can revel in the alternative reality of poetry, but when his *névrose* is obtrusive, his fantastic readings merely exacerbate his symptoms, leading to greater mental pathology.

Amongst his various hallucinations beyond poetry, the protagonist hears church bells, an aesthetic element that reintroduces one of des Esseintes' important artistic fixations: Christianity. His preoccupation with the artistic and ritual aspects of Catholicism surfaces repeatedly, going back to the beginning of the novel and des Esseintes' memories of his Jesuit education. As the novel and his *névrose* progresses, the narrative voice repeatedly describes the protagonist's contemplation of Christianity and the Catholic Church. At times the protagonist contemplates religious doctrine and at other times considers only artistic elements of the Church, but the narrative voice reveals des Esseintes associating religion with *névrose*. It is not clear to the reader whether the protagonist considers religion a cause, effect, or cure in relation to *névrose*, but he makes the existence of a muddled connection clear. The narrative voice relates des Esseintes' attempt to determine the effect of Jesuit education on his current opinions; the narrative voice directly quotes a brief flash of insight by des Esseintes about his own disturbing tendencies – an insight that he simultaneously rejects and blames on the Jesuits' inculcation of a love for the concept of the ideal: “Il s’arrêta net, brisa le fil de ses réflexions. – Allons, se dit-il, dépité, je suis encore plus atteint que je ne le croyais; voilà que j’argumente avec moi-même, ainsi qu’un casuiste” (126). There is Huysmans introduces ambiguity here over whether or not the protagonist is stricken by perverse *névrose*, Jesuit doctrine, or both; the narrative voice's description of this ambiguity contributes in its own way to the overall incompatibility between the protagonist's



methods of self-medication for *névrose* (here, ruminations on religion) and the visible results of the same (confusion, anxiety, resentment). Des Esseintes experiences a moment of surprising self-awareness regarding unexpected conversion; the narrative voice explicitly cites the protagonist's conclusions: "la crainte de cette maladie ol va finir par déterminer la maladie elle-même" (126). Des Esseintes goes through similar conflations of theological *névrose* and religious belief several more times, but always demonstrating both incompatibility and excess.

The author demonstrates des Esseintes' lack of interest in theology beyond the realm of dramatic contradictions and disputes in several ways: the narrative voice relates the protagonist's preoccupation with schisms, heated disputes and specious reasoning:

il pensait, malgré lui, à des interprétations contradictoires de dogmes, à des apostasies perdues ... Des bribes de ces schismes, des bouts de ces hérésies, qui divisèrent, pendant des siècles, les Eglises de l'Occident et de l'Orient, lui revenaient. (127)

Huysmans implies the same characteristics of his protagonist in a subtler fashion as well; he has the narrative voice remind the reader of des Esseintes' notable preference for perversity and memories of parochial education. The narrative voice then relates how the protagonist acknowledges the perversity of his predilections even as he blames his tastes on his Jesuit schooling:

Ainsi, ses tendances vers l'artifice, ses besoins d'excentricité, n'étaient-ils pas, en somme, des résultats d'études spécieuses, de raffinements extraterrestres, de spéculations quasi théologiques? (126)

Huysmans incorporates contempt for the Jesuits in his formulation of how des Esseintes sees himself; the narrative voice makes it clear that even the protagonist acknowledges his tendency to pursue alternative reality and attributes it to the speciousness and hypocrisy of his teachers.

In the last chapter, des Esseintes becomes even more open about his partiality for *bizarrierie* rather than doctrine in religion:

Il eût fallu avoir des opinions identiques ... et il le faisait volontiers dans ses moments d'ardeur, un catholicisme salé d'un peu de magie ... et d'un peu de sadisme ... ce mysticisme dépravé et artistement pervers vers lequel il s'acheminait, à certaines heures, ne pouvait même être discuté avec un prêtre qui ne l'eût pas compris ou l'eût aussitôt banni avec horreur. (236-237)

The narrative voice presents the protagonist's critical analyses and opinions regarding a variety of approaches to Catholicism; Huysmans shows his main character strongly attracted to a perverse and *outré* attitude, tempting des Esseintes away from skepticism at times. Eventually, the author makes religion a part of his protagonist's aesthetic self-reinvention; in the narrative voice's portrayal of des Esseintes, Catholicism functions as a manifestation of his pretensions to an aesthetic modification of empirical reality. The protagonist's frequent yearnings for a perverted form of Catholicism implies in and of itself the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ; his pursuit of a religious alternative reality is equivalent to a rejection of the empirical universe and, more specifically, the materialism of his times:

c'était enfin, l'immense, la profonde, l'incommensurable goujaterie du financier et du parvenu, rayonnant, tel qu'un abject soleil, sur la ville idolâtre qui éjaculait, à plat ventre, d'impurs cantiques devant le tabernacle impie des banques (239-240)

The narrative voice's phrasing and diction in des Esseintes' denunciation reveals how he sees the prevalence and power of untrammelled financial domination. The narrative voice uses a comparison to the sun to depict men of finance, and reprises religious devotion to characterize the repellant dedication of society to immoral lucre; this description implies the same philosophical pair, but this time with a focus on the protagonist's denunciation of society rather than on his desire for an alternative reality. Huysmans has his narrative voice quote des Esseintes' own words within the account by the narrative voice of the protagonist's logical progression from condemnation of contemporary society to damnation of it: "croule donc, société! meurs donc, vieux monde! s'écria des Esseintes, indigné par l'ignominie du spectacle qu'il évoquait" (240). With his and other such statements by the narrative voice, the author explicitly ties together des Esseintes' obsession with the aesthetics lacking in society (which here is equivalent to empirical reality), his conviction that his alternative reality is superior to the outside world, and the obvious empirical symptoms of excess and *névrose*.

The desire to believe becomes an essential element of the protagonist's last attempt at alteration of reality and theoretically consequent elimination of *névrose*. Des Esseintes' final return to Paris is, to the contrary, an alteration not of reality but rather of setting. At the end of the novel, Huysmans fashions a last unsuccessful effort by his protagonist to alter reality; des Esseintes appeals to God for a reconciliation of his desire

for the alternative reality of Catholicism and the eternal intrusions of skepticism and mental pathology. futile Catholicism, the ultimate of aesthetic excess:

Seigneur, prenez pitié du chrétien qui doute, de l'incrédule qui voudrait  
croire, du forçat de la vie qui s'embarque seul, dans la nuit, sous un  
firmament que n'éclairent plus les consolants fanaux du vieil espoir! (241)

Des Esseintes is trapped in incompatibility, an expression of the pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ ;

he restates variations of the contrast between his need to believe in Christianity and his fundamental doubt of Catholic doctrine. With the protagonist's direct words, the author defines the essential conflict between the reality of a *névrosé*'s mental and emotional distortion and excess and the sufferer's longing for an aesthetic alternative reality where the products of his irrationality and mental pathology are the standards of reality.

In *À Rebours*, Joris-Karl Huysmans fashioned a protagonist whose *névrose* and desire for alternative reality becomes more detailed and better defined in the variations of excess as the narrative progresses. The author limned des Esseintes' aesthetic addiction as a method of achieving alternative reality that was inherent in him and intertwined with his hereditary mental, sensory, and emotional pathology. In the overlapping short stories of Jean Lorrain's *Contes d'un buveur d'éther*, the author also formulated characters who pursued alternative reality via excess and addiction. In contrast to des Esseintes, however, Lorrain's Serge Allitof and M. de Jacquels do not appear to have been natively *névrosés* or searching for alternative reality their entire lives. To the contrary, Lorrain created protagonists whose ill-defined adult *névrose* becomes an impetus to experiment

with a rejection of empirical reality and an immersion in the alternative reality of addiction, a voluntary plunge into the incompatibility of  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ .

#### ADDICTION AND ALTERNATIVE REALITY – *CONTES D'UN BUVEUR D'ÉTHÉR*

For my analysis of the *Contes d'un buveur d'éther*, I shall begin by exploring the differences between Jean Lorrain's stories and Huysmans' *À Rebours* as well as their similarities in theme (i.e., the type of alternative reality that they both feature and the pathological condition of *névrose*. I shall follow this by a presentation of work's form and characteristics of its treatment of narrative focus and person. After this discussion, I shall proceed to a general presentation of Lorrain's depiction of *névrose* and alternative reality; following this general presentation, I shall examine four specific stories in the *Contes* in terms of Lorrain's interweaving of reader destabilization in the plots and his presentation of the connection between *névrose* and the addictive search for alternative reality. Finally, I shall synthesize these analyses of individual stories into an exposition of Lorrain's conception of the alternative reality characteristic of these obsessive *névrosés* and their methods for pursuing it.

Unlike *À Rebours*, Jean Lorrain's *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* is not a self-contained novel with a single protagonist; it is instead a series of connected short stories sharing themes and often characters. The seven of the nine stories make use of a first-person narrator (who may or may not always be the same individual), though two have a very thin frame of third-person external narration instead. A number of these tales feature one or both of two characters: Serge Allitof, a one-time ether addict, and de Jacquels, another enthusiast of ether, an aesthete and often a foil for Allitof. Like des Esseintes, Lorrain's

characters are aesthetes and decadents in flight from modern society and/or their current lives; again, like Huysmans' protagonist, they find a form of artificial certainty in altered reality and excess. Lorrain creates a variant portrait of the *névrosé's* vision of the incongruity between empirical reality and the alternative reality that they pursue. The pair  $\frac{\text{alteration of reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  underlies both Huysmans' and Lorrain's investigations of the excess and delusion inherent in an addict's desire to seek out an alternative reality that is in direct contrast to the empirical world around him; the addictive method of this search is variable, and of less importance than the goal of alternative reality. In contrast to Huysman's formulation of *des Esseintes*, Lorrain does not incorporate a single, unified origin for his addicts' *névrose* and quest for alternative reality; though the forms of his characters' excesses vary in the different tales, they generally revolve around intoxicating substances or ideals. While not every protagonist in the *Contes* is an admitted addict, it is ultimately fitting to describe their altered realities as types of what contemporary psychology termed *délire toxique*, a condition connected to *névrose*: "Le délire par perversion des facultés cérébrales, provoqué par une cause spécifique: c'est le délire toxique proprement dit," (Ball 357). The form of addiction that Lorrain made the core of his work – ether abuse – has general symptoms that strongly correspond to the aforementioned symptoms of *délire toxique*:

C'est d'abord une sorte d'exaltation subite de la sensibilité sensoriale,  
 suivie presque aussitôt de vertiges, puis, mais très-rapidement, il survient  
 de la torpeur intellectuelle avec sentiment de béatitude à laquelle succède

l'indifférence absolue, l'obtusion des sens et la perte progressive de contact avec le monde extérieur. (Debierre 290)

For my purposes, though the use ether as Lorrain portrays it is the obsession particularly representative of the contemporary French model of *délire toxique*, Lorrain also includes other *causes spécifiques* (e.g., aesthetics or need for another individual's certainty) that according to him promotes a *névrosé* character's obsessive preoccupation with his own distorted personal perceptions and an emphatic rejection of empirical reality. Lorrain's characters do not necessarily consciously seek out an altered reality; they do, nevertheless, fasten onto such an alteration when they experience a *délire toxique*. The author has them perceive the alteration of reality via hallucinatory visions and images while insisting that these non-empirical versions of reality contain truth on some level – even when they possess evidence to the contrary.

At this point it is essential to provide a summary of the characters and the variations on the theme of “altered reality” and *délires toxiques* that Lorrain incorporated into the four stories in the *Contes* that I examine (Table 4). Notably, the titles of the individual pieces indicate the focus of the *idée fixe* in each case.

Table 4: Individual stories in the *Contes*

Story #	Story title	Major characters	Central delusion	Source of “délire toxique”
1	“Le mauvais gîte”	“je,” Allitof	Cursed dwelling	Ether
2	“Une nuit trouble”	de Jacquels	Harpy attack	Carbon Monoxide, ether
3	“Réclamation posthume”	“je,” de Romer	Murder of Donatello's “Femme inconnue”	Aesthetics, friend's certainty
5	“Les trous du masque”	“je” [Allitof?], de Jackels (sic)	Hidden unreality of other people	Ether

In my analysis, I will discuss the four tales not in the order of appearance but rather in terms of the source of *délire toxique* they explore: ether (1 and 5 ); aesthetics (3); and other/mixed (2).

Ether, the most prominent of these sources, may not have had the widespread popularity of drugs like morphine or hashish, but the anesthetic had acquired a following as a recreational substance in the late nineteenth century; Partridge notes “Strawberries soaked in ether were a delicacy at some society functions. Those whose taste for the anesthetic led to addiction quickly abandoned the fruit in favor of up to half a liter a day, sometimes with brandy.” (Partridge 125). He also mentions the *fin de siècle* broad range of sources in alternative reality, some physical and some mental: “contemporary accounts frequently conflated analgesic effects with the experience of transcendence” (70), which goes some way toward explaining why an individual who desired an altered reality would turn to ether in the first place.

#### AN ETHERIC APARTMENT

The first story in the *Contes*, “Le mauvais gîte,” acts as a kind of template for the other stories, training the reader to read for certain mechanisms and indices. With this story Lorrain introduces the reader to the possibility of unreliable narration as well as the idea of superstitious beliefs as indicators of *névrose* and *délire toxique*. In addition, the reader becomes familiar with particular long-term consequences of addiction that influence a character’s desire for alternative reality, especially the persistence of *délire toxique* even in the absence of the addicting element, and their continuing confusion and resentment related to the empirical world around them. Lorrain here introduces Serge Allitof, one of the recurring characters and explicitly an ether-drinker, through the un-



named narrator's account of Allitof's relentless and distorted perceptions of his dwelling and the narrator's examples of his conversations with the *névrosé* addict. The tale revolves around Allitof's "bizarre" apartment (which Lorrain has him consider a paranormal danger, an indication of *délire toxique*) and his hallucinations regarding it. True to the decadent nature of Lorrain's protagonists, the author describes Allitof as an "affiné d'art et d'élégance" (Lorrain 91), an "homme de lettres artiste épris depuis quinze ans des vieilleries à la mode" who is also self-consciously eccentric in his choice of lodgings (93). Like des Esseintes, Allitof deliberately seeks out the *outré* in his preferences for art and decoration; as Huysmans indicated, this kind of attraction to what is excessive or perverse can be an indication of *névrose*. The protagonist's apartment is in a charming neighborhood, but above a wine shop whose façade is confusingly decorated with billiard balls and cues. Worse yet, the interior of the higher floors of the building features a narrow corridor of "sordidité presque infâme" (91), dilapidated stairs, and a stench of plumbing. Nevertheless, this disreputable residence has the advantage of costing "only" 900 francs per month in rent. Given that in 1895 furnished apartments containing even more rooms (and on comparable floors) were advertised for between 400FF and 700FF a month in good areas of the nearby eighth arrondissement,<sup>56</sup> Lorrain's characterization of "Sergeon" as seeing 900 FF per month for a decrepit apartment in a dubious building as cheap confirms that the character is an aesthete with no sense of moderation.

The first indication the reader receives that Serge is not just a man of odd tastes but an unreliable sufferer from *délires toxiques* as well is via the nameless narrator, a friend

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<sup>56</sup> *Echo de la location*, October 27 1895, pp. 4-5

of the protagonist. Lorrain paints Allitof as obviously unreliable as an individual who hallucinates, contradicts himself, and demonstrates physical symptoms of substance abuse; it is less clear whether or not Lorrain intends his narrator to be unreliable, though there are hints here and there of fallibility in the narrator's occasional belief in Allitof's reliability in the midst of his general dubiousness regarding Allitof's accuracy. A mutual acquaintance informs the narrator that Allitof is not truly well:

"Vous savez qu'il est très mal ... il en est aux hallucinations maintenant ;  
il paraît que de l'autre côté de la rue on l'entend hurler la nuit ... Il paraît  
qu'il parle et s'exalte durant des heures" (96-97)

While it is true that these symptoms might come from some other form of insanity, the title *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* already gives the audience an indication of *délire toxique*. The narrator's visit to Allitof's lodging makes clear the protagonist's problem: ether. Lorrain has the narrator claim that "rien n'y sentait l'halluciné" in the apartment, but nevertheless observes that "il flottât dans tout l'appartement une persistante odeur d'éther" (100). This self-contradictory set of characterizations constitute one of the author's indications that the narrator may not be entirely reliable. The narrator emphasizes ether's effects on Allitof and his consequent distance from empirical reality by mentioning Sergeon's obsession with occultism and stating that "avec une exaltation maniaque dont on flatte la manie il s'embarquait dans d'invraisemblables histoires de sortilèges et de possessions" (100-101). Possession is an *idée fixe* for Allitof that Lorrain uses to emphasize Serge's *névrosé* obsession with the supernatural; Allitof demonstrates "les yeux extraordinairement fixes dans une face affreusement décomposée" waiting and listening for mysterious sounds, fingering a revolver and scratching at his neck until he

draws blood (105-106). Later the narrator reveals that Sergeant's symptoms of *délire toxique* and rejection of reality only grow worse with time; they are, in fact, rooted in Allitof and not necessarily his lodgings. Despite the fact that Allitof has moved to a hotel, he insists feverishly that the rooms there smell of rot and that "on a dû certainement tuer quelqu'un dans celle que j'habitais" (107).

The author conveys to the reader both the lasting nature of *délire toxique* and Allitof's fixation on an altered reality when he has the Sergeant's *délire* has persisted even after he has stopped taking ether. When the narrator runs into Allitof somewhat later, Serge reports that he is cured. According to the narrator, Allitof does look hale and hearty and he remarks confidently that "Hein, changé, l'ami Serge. Je suis guéri et bien guéri, va. Plus d'ensorcellement et je n'entends plus rien dans le mur" (108). Though Lorrain intends for the reader to see that Allitof himself is convinced that not only is he cured, but that Serge – who is unreliable – is certain as well that he is also cured of his paranormal hallucinations. Nevertheless, just after Allitof's claim, Lorrain has Serge add other statements that demonstrate his unreliability by contradicting his previous claims and invalidate the theory that he has returned to empirical reality: "Ce maudit appartement m'avait envoûté, parole! ... tu sais qu'il porte malheur" (108). The author has the Allitof unconsciously confirm that he is still mired in alternative reality and persists in the belief that his former lodging was truly the cause of his delusions (rather than *délire toxique*); according to Sergeant, the apartment destroyed a later resident as well:

[il] s'y est suicidé il n'y a pas un mois, un brave chef de bureau du ministère de l'intérieur, qui au bout de six semaines de séjour s'est mis à y

hurler la nuit et à y entendre et à y voir ce qui me tourmentait moi-même

(108)

In attributing such assertions to Allitof, Lorrain presents an incongruity in his character's *névrosé* mental state that suggests the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . Allitof's contention that he is cured not only of his addiction but of his hallucinatory supernatural *idées fixes* represents alternative reality and excess while the fundamental persistence of the mental distortions due to continuing *délire toxique* exemplifies empirical reality.

#### GOthic ETHER

The tale "Les trous du masque" is one of Mardi Gras and ether, though it does not feature Allitof by name. What it does feature is the mysterious and gothic nature of *délire toxique*. The nameless "je" narrating voice is also the protagonist; is this the narrator from the previous story, or someone else entirely – Allitof, even? In this story Lorrain presents his anonymous narrator obeying his friend de Jackels declaration that the two should go together to a special and shadowy Mardi Gras soirée; de Jackels is commanding in the matter:

Vous voulez en voir, m'avait dit mon ami de Jakels, soit, procurez-vous un domino et un loup ... et attendez-moi chez vous mardi. Vers dix heures et demie, j'irai vous prendre (141)

The fact that the author actually begins the tale with a statement in the voice of the de Jackels rather than the outer narrating voice implies that de Jackels is the motive force in this excursion and the narrator is closer to a passive object in it. In addition, Lorrain's choice allows him to suggest that the narrator is suggestible and therefore less than completely reliable.

The scenario of an eerie Carneval with identity-hiding masks is very nearly a *lieu commun* for gothic or macabre fiction, particularly given its epitaph from Baudelaire: “Le charme de l’horreur ne tente que les forts” (141). The reader is thus prepared for mysterious or odd occurrences from the very beginning, and the protagonist’s unfolding *délire toxique* presents florid examples of such in quantity. If the audience had not already suspected from the collection’s title and the preceding tales that there is *délire toxique* in the narrative, there are numerous hints in the text of this condition. The narrator conforms to gothic convention in his costume: a medieval gown, an enveloping mask, and a satin beard. By this point in the *Contes*, the reader has become familiar with the symptoms of etheric *délire toxique*, and the narrator unquestionably displays these even beyond his odd costume. Lorrain has the narrator feelingly describe his disquieting experience while waiting for de Jackels:

chauffant aux braises du foyer mes pieds horripilés par le contact irritant  
de la soie ... les deux bougies brûlaient si droites qu'un énervement  
finissait par me prendre et, soudain effaré devant ces trois lumières, je me  
levai pour aller en souffler une (141-142)

Thus, early on Lorrain’s narrator reveals signs of *délire toxique* that recall those that the author attributed to Allitof in “Le mauvais gîte”: his skin is excessively sensitive, he has fits of nervous disquiet, and he has excessive reactions to otherwise mundane phenomena. He claims that he feels disturbed by the presence of a masked individual sprawled on a chair, surrounded by mirrors and the aforementioned candles:

Assez étrange et même inquiétante à la longue, en y réfléchissant, cette  
veillée solitaire d'une forme masquée affalée dans un fauteuil, dans le clair

obscur de ce rez-de-chaussée ... assourdi de tentures avec, dans les miroirs  
pendus aux murailles ... et le vacillement de deux longues bougies très  
blanches, sveltes, comme funéraires (142)

When he speaks of the masked figure, the narrator is referring to himself; he is describing his own state as though he were a mere observer. This apparent dissociation Lorrain attributes to his narrator is an important indicator of the latter's pathological mental state, but not the only one; in addition, the adjectives the author has his narrator use reflect the excessively intense perceptions of the *névrosé* and the connected tendency toward an alternative reality (here one tied to the supernatural). The narrator begins the story in a mentally gothic ambiance (unnerved and quasi-hallucinatory), and that is how he stays, lodged in *délire toxique*.

Once de Jackels arrives and collects the narrator, the author portrays an eerie ride through a nighttime landscape perfectly in concert with the narrator's distorted perceptions, including skeletal trees and a threatening moon:

Au bord de cette Seine taciturne et pâle ... le long de ces quais plantés de  
grands arbres maigres aux branchages écartés comme des doigts de mort  
une peur irraisonnée me prenait, une peur aggravée par le silence  
inexplicable de Jakels; j'en arrivai à douter de sa présence et à me croire  
auprès d'un inconnu.... sous la lune qui venait enfin d'écorner une bande  
de nuages et semblait répandre sur cet équivoque paysage de banlieue une  
nappe grésillante de mercure et de sel (144-145)

The *névrosé* protagonist with his *délire toxique* attributes threatening and macabre qualities to the atmosphere as he progresses down the familiar banks of the Seine; while

there is no question that a dark and stormy night can make even familiar sights seem menacing or uncanny, the lurid detail and the self-admitted irrationality that Lorrain includes in the narrator's description reinforce the pathological qualities with which the author limns him. In an extension of the gothic conventions that Lorrain incorporates into his narrative, the destination is an abandoned church in which the ball room contains the old sanctuary (147-148). Church or ball venue, the characteristics that Lorrain gives the building's interior are *outré* and puzzling.

Une grande salle très haute aux murs crépis à la chaux, des volets intérieurs hermétiquement clos aux fenêtres; dans toute la longueur de la salle des tables avec des gobelets de fer blanc retenus par des chaînes ... là-dessus le gaz sifflant haut et clair : la salle ordinaire, en somme ... d'un troquet de barrière, dont le commerce irait bien (145-146).

Lorrain has the narrator include a contrasting combination of gothic and banal elements that reinforces the erratic nature of the perceptions that he has given his narrator; the uncanny room has dilapidated walls, hermetically sealed windows, and chained iron goblets, but also has realistic qualities such as modern, efficient gas lamps and an overall resemblance to a suburban bar. Both the attendees and the staff are universally masked, the latter with disturbing burlesque visages.

le patron ... chose bizarre, que lui aussi était masqué, mais d'un grossier cartonage burlesquement enluminé, imitant un visage humain. Les deux garçons de service, circulaient en silence, invisibles eux aussi, sous le même affreux masque (146)

Universal masks guarantee the anonymity of the staff, and there is something inherently disturbing about the burlesque; the author thus reinforces the disturbing impression of the location. The guests are mute and apparently identical; they wear silvery hoods, green robes with large black sleeves, black gloves, and crowns of black lilies

tous ces masques étaient semblables, gainés dans la même robe verte d'un vert blême comme soufré d'or, à grandes manches noires, et tous encapuchonnés de vert sombre avec, dans le vide du capuchon, les deux trous d'yeux de leur cagoule d'argent ... leurs capuchons, comme celui du Dante, étaient couronnés de lys noirs. (148-149).

Because the guests are identical, they are unidentifiable, adding to the mystery of the gathering; in addition, Lorrain may have intended the narrator to be intimidated as well by a seemingly occult quality to their garb. A statement by the narrator clearly reflects the gothic nature of his *délire toxique* as well as its irrational essence:

Je sentais ma raison sombrer dans l'épouvante; le surnaturel m'enveloppait! cette rigidité, ce silence de tous ces êtres masques. Quels étaient-ils ? Une minute d'incertitude de plus, c'était la folie ! (149)

This statement in the narrator's voice is revealing; Lorrain has suggested the connection between the supernatural or gothic, uncertainty, and mental pathology such as *délire toxique*. Moreover, the fact that the author has his narrator admit that his perceptions have an element of madness in them implies that he has attributed to the narrator a subconscious knowledge of his own *névrose* or *délire toxique*. In turn, this admission reinforces the unreliability of the narrator.



The height of the narrator's fear (and climax of the story) occurs when he unmask one of the silent individuals around him and discovers that there is no face there at all:

Horreur! il n'y avait rien, rien. Mes yeux hagards ne rencontraient que le creux du capuchin; la robe, le camail, étaient vides. Cet être qui vivait n'était qu'ombre et néant (149)

With these statements by the narrator, Lorrain tellingly simultaneously alludes to hallucination, sensory distortion, excessive sensibilities, and the gothic; once more, he creates a subtle identity in his narrator between supernatural fixation, *névrose*, and *délire toxique*. The narrator's reaction to this revelation is unsurprising for someone in the grip of *délire toxique*; he is terrified that he, too, might no longer exist beneath his mask. He decides that this is true; he is still himself, just made of shadow and nothingness, and dead:

Je me précipitai vers une des glaces. Un être de songe s'y dressait devant moi, encapuchonné de vert sombre, masqué d'argent, couronné de lys noirs. Et ce masque était moi ... il n'y avait rien ... que le creux de l'étoffe arrondi sur le vide, j'étais mort (150)

Lorrain here confirms the delusional, addictive nature of his narrator; the latter is addicted to alternative reality and inimical to empirical reality, as defined by the pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ .

This drugged reverie is interrupted by the biting voice of the real de Jackels. The author has the narrator declares somewhat acidly "Et tu as encore bu de l'éther ... Singulière idée pour tromper ton ennui en m'attendant" (150). The author not only thus demonstrates that de Jackels is a foil for the addicted narrator, but uses this foil to

confirm that the reader knows that narrator's addiction is to ether; through the practical insight that Lorrain attributes to de Jackels, he indicates that this character is reliable and in consequence reinforces the narrator's unreliability through the contradiction between the his fabulation and the bare facts of his condition. As the author conveys to the reader through de Jackels, the narrator has, in fact, been unconscious his own floor the whole time rather than actually wandering through a supernatural holiday gathering. Lorrain formulates a statement by narrator that indicates that he is aware, on some level, of the rationality of his friend's comment; the author has his narrator become aware of the difference in his surroundings; he notes his own physical position slumped on the rug and the presence of a costumed de Jackels giving feverish orders to the valet. The half-recognized discordance in the narrator's perceptions is Lorrain's indication of *délire toxique* rather than overpowering mania; by now, the author has amply demonstrated that *délire toxique* makes an individual unreliable because of the sufferer's predilection for alternative reality. The narrator's *délire toxique* is such a way of life for him, and his own ability to surf the boundaries between empirical reality and his drug-warped alternative reality is so atrophied, that his only response is the simple yet thoroughly opaque statement "Il était temps" (150). Time for what? To get sober? Get up off the floor? Go to the real party? In leaving the question open in the narrator's mind, Lorrain conveys the confusion and lack of connection to empirical reality typical of a *névrosé* and an *éthéromane*; in the author's portrait of this character, excess has ultimately made him both prey to hallucinations and insensible to the incompatibility between real life and the experiences that his mind reports to him.

Ether abuse and its more detrimental consequences were familiar to the late-nineteenth century reading public; such an addiction is a particularly clear and recognizable source of the symptoms of *névrose* and, even more so, *délire toxique*. In using ether as both a cause and consequence of the pursuit of alternative reality, Lorrain subtly introduces his reader to the connections between addiction and the incongruity inherent in the denial of empirical reality. Though ether is the most common source of alternative reality in the *Contes*, the author does not confine himself to chemical addictions; he introduces other, less intuitive abuses inspiring mental pathology and a rejection of the empirical universe. A less frequent source of *névrosé délire toxique* in the collection is aesthetics, a mental phenomenon demonstrating sensory and emotional excess rather than a physical substance. Abuse of drugs can be a catalyst or an aggravating factor for aesthetic *délire toxique*, and indeed Lorrain includes this in a minor way in the stories that center on aesthetics; thus, the author creates a connection between these two inspirations for obsession with alternative reality. Nevertheless, in such tales Lorrain clearly demonstrates that *névrosé* aesthetics can be just as dangerous as any chemical substance.

#### AESTHETICS AND *DÉLIRE*

The story “Réclamation posthume” is one of those featuring aesthetics as source of *délire toxique*. In this tale, Lorrain does mention ether in passing, but what one might call “artistic instability” forms its core. It features another nameless first-person narrator and his unbalanced aesthete friend, de Romer. The author uses de Romer much as he uses de Jackels in “Les trous du masque,” as a voice separate from, and contrasting with, the anonymous narrative voice. In “Les trous du masque,” Lorrain employed his narrator

as the addicted *névrosé* and his friend as a rational foil who offered criticism of the narrator; in “Réclamation posthume,” the author once again has his anonymous narrator in the role of the pathological devotee of alternative reality and the friend as a critical voice who denies the validity of this alternative reality. Though Lorrain used similar techniques and themes to demonstrate the ultimate connections between *névrose*, *délire toxique*, and alternative reality, he also made “Réclamation posthume” part of a separate variation on his central thesis. Above all, the author formulated “Réclamation” with the aforementioned aesthetics as his narrator’s source of *délire toxique* rather than a physical addiction. The *délire toxique* in this case centers on a plaster reproduction head which Lorrain had the narrator physically embellish in the “primitive” style to make the object more aesthetically pleasing.

The narrator’s self-consciously artistic friend de Romer opens the story by asking who the aforementioned head represents, and comments sharply on its aesthetic qualities: “Très réussi comme horreur et d’une jolie perversion de goût, ce chef de décollée ... On dirait un primitif ... (sic) quelque sainte Cécile” (121-122). De Romer’s distaste and disgust for his friend’s artistic sensibilities are immediately obvious, as is the implication that the narrator is excessive and perverse in his tastes. Though these statements are definitely indicative of de Romer’s own peculiar nature, they turn out to be accurate clues to the hallucinogenic nature with which Lorrain created his narrator; the author suggests the latter’s *névrose* and *délire toxique* through de Romer’s commentary, bringing the gruesome and flamboyant nature of the narrator’s artwork to the fore. Lorrain has the narrator admit to his friend that he himself decorated the head, a plaster museum reproduction from Donatello’s *Femme inconnue*. He describes its origin as “une fantaisie

qui m'était venue de posséder, sanglante et martyrisée;" he embellished it by adding plaster drops of blood and "barbare coloriage" (122) in a moment of leisure. In reaction, the unstable de Romer then turns upon the narrator, accusing him of having a perverted nature and too much daring: "voilà que vous mutilez les chefs-d'oeuvre maintenant!". Lorrain has de Romer insist that the narrator is no more than a murderer possessed by a diabolical fantasy, and a terrible, if unconscious, criminal.

The narrator in turn declares that his friend is not entirely sane, but rather *névrosé*: "un déséquilibré à l'imagination ardente, au bon sens depuis longtemps sombre dans les pratiques de l'occultisme" (Lorrain). Though Lorrain's narrator is unreliable, the description that the author has him transmit suggests that de Romer is possibly a sufferer from *névrose*. Even so, the fact that Lorrain has made his narrator unreliable leaves enough doubt in the readers mind regarding de Romer's mental state that it is impossible to dismiss his characterization of his friend and difficult to ignore the possibility that the narrator is merely attributing his own pathology to de Romer. The author reinforces the incongruity of  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  in the narrator in a contrasting his words and actions. Lorrain fashions the narrator's disingenuous alternative reality in his narrator's displacement of his own *névrose* onto his friend and his insistence on the reality of supernatural occurrences; the author equally reveals the empirical reality behind the narrator's pathology with his unreliable account of his own actions, ones suggestive of *délire toxique*.

Some days after his conversation with de Romer, working alone late at night, the narrator is seized by the conviction that he was not alone, that there was some invisible

presence nearby (an obsession familiar to the audience after having read about Allitof the ether addict). According to the narrator, his impression was, in fact, true. After hearing footsteps, he sees beneath some drapes an attractive and seemingly amputated foot: an “adorable apparition” (126). It is at this point that Lorrain introduces mentions ether and reveals that the protagonist is no stranger to the drug, even if he is not a regular user. The narrator rhetorically inquires “Avez-vous remarqué l’imperceptible parfum d’éther qui se dégage de la neige?”, a statement with clearly hallucinatory overtones (126). He states that snow affects him the same way ether does, i.e., “me déséquilibre et me trouble” (126). Lorrain leaves the question open of whether the narrator truly does feel the same effects from snow that he does from ether or whether he is taking the drug while seeing the snow. In either case, the author has provided his narrator with symptoms of *délire toxique*; if he does feel identical effects, it indicates that his perceptions and sensory experiences are as distorted, and if he is attributing the effects of ether that he has taken to the snow he is confusing alternative reality with empirical reality. There is one other possibility, that he is simply lying about the effects of the snow (with or without ether use); Lorrain has made his narrator unreliable, but to believe deception beyond mere disingenuousness means that it is equally likely that he is deceitful about every other part of his account, thus rendering analysis meaningless.

Lorrain’s text implies that the protagonist is suffering from some sort of *névrose* of uncertain origin. Several weeks after the appearance of the disembodied foot, the protagonist is again working alone and has an even more disturbing vision: he now sees two feet as well as the form of a female body outlined behind the curtain. The author shows the narrator as caught up enough in this delusion to arrive at a state “à la fois sous

le charme et l'épouvante" in which "une puissance plus forte que ma volonté m'entraînait" (127). The protagonist has become more skeptical about the reality of his visions, yet also seems to suspect his household drapes of having some connection to a fantastic reality: "j'en arrivai à suspecter ma portière ... je l'avais achetée à Tunis, dans un de ces bazars de là-bas, et tout était louche en elle ... sa nuance même m'inquiétait" (127). Despite the author's attribution of an alternative reality fixation to his narrator in response to this vision, Lorrain inserts an indication as well of the co-existing empirical reality and the narrator's relieved recognition of it:

Je faisais enlever la portière; l'agencement de mon cabinet en souffrait,  
mais je recouvrais mon calme et reprenais le cours de mes travaux  
nocturnes, comme si rien ne s'était passé. (128)

In the narrator's discovery that there is nothing behind the drapes and his permanent removal of them with a concurrent return to what he considers normal, Lorrain suggests that at this point the narrator is not completely pathological and can recognize hallucination and distance himself from alternative reality. For a time, the author renders the pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  less distinct and renders the incongruity it represents more fluid.

Despite narrator's tentative characterization of his visions as hallucinations provoked by an outside cause, by the point of his next and most intense vision, he appears to becoming more certain that these escalating apparitions are fact; the narrator is swinging back to alternative reality, strengthening once more the pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . Here, Lorrain reintroduces the over-decorated reproduction of "*La femme inconnue*" that had

begun the whole tale. The author's choice to use this aesthetic object only in the beginning and the end of the story highlights the manner in which aesthetic *délire toxique* can be both a trigger for increasing preoccupation with alternative reality and a result of adhesion to this reality and a rejection of empirical reality. As Lorrain has trained the reader to expect from a *névrosé*, whether natural or induced, the plaster head has become a frightening element of the supernatural to the narrator. During a post-supper nap, he suddenly wakes to a haunted feeling typical of *délire toxique*: "je vis, ô terreur! que la tête coupée brillait étrangement dans l'ombre. Les yeux fixes, elle baignait, nimbée d'or, dans un halo de clarté" (128). The characteristics that Lorrain gives the narrator's hallucination of the head he had decorated reveal once again sensory distortion; the author uses the narrator's description of his experience to connect this distortion to preoccupation with the supernatural and aesthetic obsession. The head, however, is only one portion of the hallucination; harking back to de Romer's accusations of metaphorical murder, the rest of the statue appears as a decapitated cadaver leaning against the door, blue, cold, and dripping blood (128). Unsurprisingly for such an intense hallucination, the presumably non-plaster body shakes and convulses while the head disturbingly stares at the protagonist. As an ether addict or pure *névrosé* might do, the narrator collapses in a welter of existential anguish, rolling around on the carpet (129). Lorrain thus conveys to the reader that a victim of aesthetic *délire toxique* has a condition as pathological as a substance abuser or a natively disturbed sufferer from sensory and sentimental perversion. The narrator's fixation on a grotesque *objet d'art*, the frantic and escalating nature of his delirious visions, and his excessive physical and psychological reactions indicate as well as his growing certainty that altered reality is profound and



fundamentally accurate, whereas empirical reality is deceptive and inapplicable to his situation; Lorrain has fully returned his narrator to the incongruity exemplified by the pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . The author inevitably brings his tales back to this opposition between alternative reality and empirical reality, and does so with causes for *délire toxique* that are even more complex than drug addiction and aesthetic preoccupation.

#### TOXIC MISCELLANY

Though the majority of the stories in the *Contes* treat either addiction or aesthetic obsession, several tales present more intricate forms of *délire toxique*. “Une nuit trouble” features the character de Jacquels, possibly the same individual who appears in “Les trous du masque,” though it is difficult to tell whether Lorrain created these characters as identical or separate; the orthography of the names is different, though their pronunciation is the same. In addition, though de Jackels acts as a rational foil in “Les trous du masque,” the author portrays de Jacquels as exhibiting the symptoms of *délire toxique* whom Lorrain eventually reveals as his own foil and thus indefinite in his views of the relationship between alternative reality and empirical reality. Lorrain gives the story a thin and ambiguous frame which could be either third-person or anonymous first-person; the vast majority of the tale, however, is first-person narration by de Jacquels; it becomes clear from the phrasing and gothic tropes that he both uses and undercuts that the author presents his protagonist as a self-consciously theatrical raconteur who is familiar with the characteristics of *délire toxique* from his own intermittent experiences, able to manipulate the presentation of these symptoms to produce particular effects. Lorrain appears to have his narrator function here merely as a device to set the stage for the context of the tale; it takes place during a drinking session amongst a group of male

friends; during this gathering, de Jacquels steers the conversation to the subject of “La somme de mystère et d’effroi” (111) which for him is exemplified by the poetry of Maurice Rollinat. Lorrain has definite reasons for having his protagonist mention Rollinat specifically; in 1885 this author had published in 1885 a volume of poetry entitled *Les Névroses*, of which an 1895 biographical dictionary stated, “les sous-titres ... indiquent suffisamment le caractère macabre et la recherche de l'excentricité” (Vapereau 90). In the author’s formulation, de Jacquels cites a different work by Rollinat, *Nature*, seemingly somewhat dismissive of an author who represents the gothic ideal so perfectly. He ostentatiously uses one particular poem, “La nuit d’orage,” as a lead-in to his supposedly harrowing anecdote. This poem begins “Dans un logis antique au fond de la campagne” (Rollinat 212); in parallel, the setting of de Jacquels’ tale is an old country house during a period of particularly inclement weather. Lorrain chooses various other elements from the poem for his protagonist to mention, though de Jacquels’ relatively uncritical audience seems unaware of his obvious use of gothic devices and hyperbolic language.

The author emphasizes de Jacquels’ ambiguous intent in recounting his anecdote by having the protagonist declaim after briefly quoting Rollinat, “Eh bien! cette nuit d’épouvante, moi, qui ne suis ni superstitieux ni nerveux, je l’ai vécue dans des circonstances si étranges qu’il faut, ma foi, que je vous la raconte” (112). After a burst of broad foreshadowing, de Jacquels launches into a florid gothic mystery that initially appears to be the rambling of yet another obsessive victim of aesthetic *délire toxique* like des Esseintes or Allitof. During his stay at the antiquated country estate in eerie surroundings, it seems that de Jacquels had been relegated to a frigid room (in both the

literal and the metaphorical sense) in a particularly isolated wing, with a marvelous view of a bleak landscape:

Superbe, en effet, le paysage! mais d'une détresse à vous noyer l'âme de spleen ... c'était à boucler sa valise et à reprendre le train le soir même ... la chambre était froide et sèche comme un parloir de couvent! (113)

De Jacquels' hosts had neglected to heat his room, and with this detail Lorrain stages increasing discomfort as reported by his protagonist and thus a desire to abandon empirical reality and enter alternative reality. Once de Jacquels' hosts realized their omission, they did send a servant to his room with a chouberski stove, noting that it would be removed when he went up to bed. Thus, when the protagonist went up to bed at 10 p.m., the chouberski had been lit for some hours before being removed (114).

Because of the chemical dangers of the chouberski and its mind-altering products, it is essential to mention several characteristics of the stove that were common knowledge in the 1890s. As the popular technical encyclopedia *Les merveilles de la science* explains, at times

il se produit de l'oxyde de carbone, gaz éminemment toxique. Et si le tirage de la cheminée est faible ou nul, le gaz oxyde de carbone peut refluer dans la pièce d'appartement, et occasionner des accidents d'asphyxie aux personnes qui l'occupent" (Figuier 523)

In other words, Lorrain is including in his narrative a stove which produces a dangerous substance, carbon monoxide gas [CO], which can have severe physical effects. The article continues to warn of the dangers of CO and recommend how one might counter this threat:

Le mieux donc est d'essayer de diminuer leurs dangers, en les signalant au public, afin que ... les consommateurs observent les précautions dont l'oubli peut mettre leur vie en péril" (524)

At lower doses, Figuier even describes the effect of CO inhalation as a sort of "intoxication" (531), another reason for the author to choose this particular kind of heat source given his focus on intoxication and *délire toxique*.

To invoke the intoxicating effects of CO emissions, it was essential that Lorrain have his protagonist specify that no one bothered to check the condition of the chouberski stove in his room and that it had been on long enough to warm the large room thoroughly: "grâce au chouberski maintenant enlevé, la température était fort supportable" (Lorrain 115). Thus, Lorrain suggests to the reader that de Jacquels' room contained weak CO vapors drifting about. It was common knowledge that CO inhalation induces sleep, or at least unconsciousness (as we can tell from Figuier's article); certainly de Jacquels falls asleep faster than he had thought he would (115). Assuming that Lorrain has de Jacquels more on the "intoxication" end of the poisoning spectrum than the fatal end, the initial hallucinations he experiences could easily be due to CO. In 1876, noted psychologist J. Moreau wrote an entire treatise on this phenomenon, suggesting that

Les hallucinations de la vue, rares dans tous les genres de folie de cause interne, sont, dans le cas qui nous occupe [mental disorders provoked by slow CO exposure], les plus fréquentes et nous ajouterons même, la règle. Elles sont variables dans leurs manifestations: cependant ce sont d'ordinaire des sensations d'étincelles, de gerbes de feu, de points brillants,

de jets de lumière, etc., d'autres fois ce sont des apparitions du genre mystique. (Moreau 19)

Moreau includes a variety of types of hallucinations: tactile, visual, and associative.

Given the characteristics with which Lorrain endows his protagonist's hallucinations, CO inhalation over several hours is a plausible contributing factor these. De Jacquels relates several particularly vivid related ones that occurred over the course of the night. First is his startling multi-sensory hallucination of a harpy. The protagonist explains that around 2:00 am, he heard a strange noise coming from the chimney behind the damper.

vers les deux heures du matin un bruit inusité m'éveillait ... dans le silence inquiet de la chambre le bruit continuait à se faire entendre, saccadé et mou comme celui d'un corps qui se heurterait aux parois d'une cloison ... il partait de la cheminée, le rideau de tôle en était baissé.

There was a sound of wings; at first, de Jacquels believed that this emanated from "quelque oiseau de passage sans doute balayé par la tempête et tombé dans cette cheminée, où il se débattait misérablement" (115). That which creates this effect the twisted alternative reality that the author attributes to the protagonist, at this point a monstrous hunched figure with wings and

un hideux bec à goître, un bec membraneux de chimérique cormoran... Hideuse et fantomatique avec son ventre énorme et comme bouffe de graisse ... sur de longues cuisses grêles et grenues aux pattes palmées" (116)

The physical qualities that Lorrain incorporates into de Jacquels' narrative are unquestionably intimidating and repellant. This description is not merely colorful on the

part of the author; the distortions of physical proportions recall the *névrosé's* perversions of sensory perception.

This terrible vision was, according to de Jacquels, both terrifying and menacing, though more the latter than the former if one judges by the narrator's reactions. He claims that the creature was threatening him with its beak, projecting a terrible aura of "le marécage et la ruine, la feuille morte et le sabbat" (116). Despite, or perhaps stimulated by, his desperate fear, de Jacquels took the offensive against this unclean mythological beast; as he expresses it, "soudain une rage me prenait" (116). He attacked the monster with fireplace tongs, eventually defeating the hallucination; even so, Lorrain has the protagonist stage a slight return to empirical reality, discovering that he was exhausted, "au bout de force," and had no choice but to leave the thing where it was, closing the damper upon it and dropping his bloody tongs.

At this point in what the author presents as delusion induced by CO, he adds another important source of *délire toxique*: ether. Despite the fact that ether all by itself causes hallucinations, the protagonist was under the impression that it will calm his nerves. He says he only had time "de courir à mon nécessaire pour y prendre mon flacon d'éther" (117), which Lorrain then has his protagonist claim that the ether made him feel much calmer, enough that he could sleep. This first hallucination is logically explicable by CO dissipating in de Jacquels' bedroom, but the author implies that the protagonist's next hallucination is due to ether, or perhaps the combination of CO and ether.

After an indeterminate period of time it starts again: "L'hallucination continuait, la cheminée était pourtant bien muette; non, le bruit venait de la croisée maintenant" (117). De Jacquels claims that another of the same genre was present in the window; Lorrain

changes the spatial locus of the unreal creatures and thus suggests an expansion of the extent of his protagonist's hallucinations. Now there are two "oiseaux monstrueux ... deux êtres pareils à la bête morte dans la cheminée" who are looking at him in an oddly sly fashion: "me regardaient sournoisement" (118), and he insists that the two creatures are discussing him in a threatening manner: "les deux monstres ailés s'entretenaient de moi évidemment, ruminaient quelque projet de vengeance" (118). The excessive insistence on the supernatural creature's ominous qualities that Lorrain attributes to his narrator supplies further evidence of *névrose* and *délire toxique*. je connais aux carreaux pour effrayer les étranges visiteurs et les faire envoler" (118). complex insists that the monsters continue to mock him even as they insolently peck at the windows. The author incorporates an element of supernatural physical terror into de Jacquels' reaction to his extended hallucination, the type of fixation on the alternative reality of the paranormal that frequently occurs in *délire toxique*. Consequently, de Jacquels indicates to his audience that he had lost all sang-froid in the face of this vision:

Décidément le cauchemar se prolongeait trop; une sueur froide me perlait au visage, je me sentais envahi par le froid de la petite mort, et, prêt à tout pour en finir, je me précipitais de nouveau hors de mon lit" (118)

Lorrain has the protagonist hint as well to his listeners, and thus the reader, that he is on some level aware that what he experiences is a product of alternative reality rather than empirical reality; he describes his vision as a nightmare, an word that can be interpreted either in a literal sense (i.e., that de Jacquels has had a hypnogogic experience) or in a metaphorical sense (this vision actually took place and was not illusion. The ordeal was not over; the delusion that the author has his protagonist describe had yet to run its full

course. While de Jacquels was fixated on the smirking apparitions in the window, he discovered that the first harpy was not, in fact, gone; Lorrain has his narrator claim that original hallucination came back to life and nearly detached his thumb. De Jacquels recounts with seeming horror that “La bête que je croyais morte au fond de la cheminée n’était qu’étourdie; elle ... s’était, à moitié mourante, trouvée à ma portée et venait de se venger en me mutilant” (119). Meanwhile, the protagonist insists that the other two harpies continued to mock him. The author has de Jacquels state that he was in such shock from physical pain and psychological terror that “je trébuchais sur le carrelage et je m’évanouis” (119); the phrasing that Lorrain attributed to his protagonist is such that the reader cannot know if de Jacquels is being truthful in attributing his collapse to the aftermath of the vision or whether he merely passed out as a result of ether use. The author ends de Jacquels’ anecdote on this note of ambiguity; according to a superficial interpretation of the protagonist’s tale, the dramatic events all occur in what is supposedly a waking state between periods of unconsciousness (sleep and post-fainting insentience). Nevertheless, Lorrain makes it clear that even were de Jacquels technically “awake,” he was almost certainly in a state of altered consciousness – *délire toxique*, in other words.

The author presents de Jacquels’ audience as being in a great a state of suspense and demand a denouement “en chœur”: “Et le lendemain?” (119). He reports that the next day he awoke in bed, feverish, with his friends at his bedside. Lorrain has him claim that the curtains were closed over the windows lately featuring the mocking monsters and that the hearth was free of the injured harpy; “pas plus de trace d’oiseau que sur ma main, je dis que sur ma main, non, car j’avais entre le pouce et l’index une longue estafilade” (119). The cut on his hand is one piece of “evidence” of the truth of de Jacquels’ story,



along with the room's extreme disorder and the presence on the floor of the aforementioned fireplace tongs with blood and tissue of some sort on them. None of this is conclusive; someone in a hallucinatory state can quite easily hurt himself with a pair of fireplace tongs and more or less destroy a bedroom. The protagonist hints at the ambiguous nature of his experience when he declares, "J'avais rêvé et pourtant je n'avais pas tout à fait rêvé" (120). Lorrain here echoes de Jacquels' ambiguous mention of a nightmare by having him both claim that the whole episode of the harpies was a dream and in the same breath deny that it was a figment of his imagination. At this point, the protagonist is actually highlighting the incongruity between empirical reality and alternative reality in giving equal emphasis to both; Lorrain has de Jacquels express the essential nature of  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  with a self-contradictory statement that hints at the character's knowledge of these conflicting views of reality.

The author then provides de Jacquels with a statement which would be a perfect ending for a typical gothic tale of horror, an example of the excessive sensibilities of a *névrosé* or a victim of *délire toxique*; he declares the impossibility of ever rationally explaining his mysterious experience: "sur cette épouvantable nuit plane toujours un mystère dont l'énigme est encore à déchiffrer" (119). With this statement, Lorrain appears to be suggesting that his protagonist is essentially a creature of alternative reality suffering from *délire toxique*. The author, however, undercuts the suggestion that de Jacquels is rejecting or ignorant of empirical reality. Directly following "encore à déchiffrer," the protagonist qualifies his statement that no explanation of his hallucinatory night is possible: "à moins que vous ne le trouviez dans cette fin de lettre ... (sic)," a letter he had received the previous day from the friend at whose home the incident had

occurred. Lorrain shapes this letter to propose a logical explanation: the letter indicated that the writer had just had the chimneys cleaned and the one in de Jacquels' nightmare room had produced the skeletons of three owls. The mirthful letter-writer says that he is keeping these skeletons for de Jacquels "puisque, c'est toi leur meurtrier. Nul doute qu'elles n'aient été asphyxiées par le chouberski de ta chambre, la nuit où tu y as couché" (119). Finally, the author has confirmed the presence of floating CO from the chouberski and its dangers de Jacquels' room. More importantly, he produces this piece of evidence, which undermines his previous implications of supernatural events, like a conjurer at the perfect strategic moment; Lorrain has his protagonist avoid mentioning ether, but the emphasis on CO as a cause of *délire toxique* underlines the variety of sources that the author presents for the condition and its concomitant preoccupation with alternative reality.

In the first story, "Le mauvais gîte," de Jacquels acted as a foil; though he is the protagonist in this tale, his last comment – the final sentence of the story – demonstrates that he continues in this role. "Et voilà, concluait de Jacquels, y aurait-ils des âmes de chouettes?" (119). Invoking owl spirits does not mean that de Jacquels is stating that he had a supernatural encounter, but it does imply that no harpies were present. Through this declaration, the author again suggests that his protagonist is aware of empirical reality and not fully entwined in alternative reality. By creating a protagonist who is his own foil, balanced between alternative reality and empirical reality, Lorrain deepened his portrayal of the nuances of *délire toxique*; he presented a victim of the condition who is not fully devoted to alternative reality or completely in the thrall of *névrose*. The mere possibility of a partial case emphasizes the complete nature of other cases like Allitof's.

Though Lorrain was a master of thematic nuance and psychological profiling, he did not neglect the possibilities of structural modification to disequilibrate his reader and underline the unstable sensitivities of sufferers of *délire toxique*. In this, Lorrain is similar to Huysmans not only in their mutual themes of excess and addiction, but also in the manipulations of time they employ within their narratives and the reinforcement this gives their portraits of sensory and mental distortions. The incongruity of the relationship between alternative reality and empirical reality lies in perception as well as actions and thoughts; by intertwining a more visceral presentation of the pair by bringing the reader into the invisible perceptions of their unbalanced characters, these two authors induce a different type of *délire toxique* in those who enter into their narratives.

#### MANIPULATION OF NARRATIVE TIME IN ALTERNATIVE REALITY

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, time in *À rebours* and *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* is essentially unstable; it is often inconsistent with a linear internal timeline, or even an internal timeline with gaps, due to the authors' manipulation and disordering of temporal order and duration. Huysmans' and Lorrain's cunning temporal manipulation increases the hallucinatory feeling in the two texts and the sense of being in a reality containing a disconnected and/or blurred narrative timeline. Interestingly, the disconnects occur on both a micro level and on the scale of what Gerard Genette refers to as "les grandes articulations narratives" (Genette 124). By this term, Genette means the division of the narrative by "une rupture temporelle et/ou spatiale importante" (124), without the text being particularly opaque at such points. Within the smaller narrative divisions, the hallucinatory quality of the blurred narrative timeline raises basic questions in the reader, such as "does the author intend for us to take this section of time as real, or

as part of a delusional anecdote?"; on the scale of the *grandes articulations*, it becomes uncertain to the reader whether the author intends for the reader to conclude that his protagonists can perceive the discontinuities in time or is so affected by *délire toxique* that he is not aware of them.

In his *Figures* III Genette supplies a useful set of terms to describe textual manipulations of time. In his system, the main timeline of the narrative is the "premier plan" (i.e., narrative "present"), while jumps backward are "analepses" (90). *Analepses* can be either "external" – simple retrospectives – or "complete," in which a retrospective scene works its way up to the narrative "present" (101). Huysmans' manipulation of time is complex in the narrative's larger articulations than on the small scale, whereas Lorrain is the reverse; the former may utilize retrospective scenes in his larger articulations, but it is clear that they are indeed retrospectives and do not interfere with the reader's ability to determine the overall temporal sequence of the work. In *À rebours*, Huysmans installs relative large-scale markers for time and place such as des Esseintes' move from Paris to Fontenay, his trip to and return from "London," and his move back to Paris. Within the clearer *grands mouvements*, however, the timeline is blurrier; the indicators of relative time are appear normally somewhere during a single plot "episode" but are almost always relative and fluid.

Huysmans' blurring of the narrative's large-scale temporality is cunning on a visceral level, and reinforces overall uncertainty on the part of the reader. Chronological markers such as "durant des mois" or "quelques jours" leave the reader vaguely confused while attempting to deduce whether or not there is any overlap between incidents, or whether des Esseintes himself is truly certain or just guessing about how long particular

events continued. More importantly, because the protagonist's susceptibility to delusion makes his judgement about the duration of the various episodes in his life suspect. The author provides some empirical indicators of the duration and order of these episodes via the opinions of his des Esseintes' servants, but their remarks are infrequent and at times indirect. The author leaves open the question of the relationship between time as the protagonist perceives it in a hallucination and time in the empirical world; the reader cannot know with certainty, for example, whether des Esseintes' imaginary trip to "London" last for much longer in his mind than what his train tickets to and from Paris showed. When it is unclear what happened in the real world as opposed to in the protagonist's fevered brain, statements of relative time become disequilibrating or even baffling.

As one would expect in a narrative concerned mostly with chemical addiction, Lorrain's *Contes d'un buveur d'éther* is more flamboyant in its treatment of temporal transmutation. Unlike Huysmans, Lorrain plays with time on the level of *grands mouvements*; he most frequently, though not solely, formulates temporal discontinuities and ambiguities in the relationships between the different tales rather than within the episodes contained in individual plotlines. Given the varied possibilities for disequilibrium in such loosely connected, albeit similarly themed narratives, it is hardly surprising that Lorrain makes zealous use of his ability to unbalance the reader not only thematically, in portraying the disturbing visions and unusual conduct by his characters, but also in structure, by manipulating the timeline that relates the various narratives. I have noted in the introduction, the various tales often feature either Serge Alitoff, the ether "drinker," or his friend and foil de Jaquels. Because Lorrain has introduced one

element of commonality between the stories in the recurring characters, the reader expects other connections, including temporality, that the author either breaks or blurs. The sequence of events inside these tales is not generally difficult to deduce, but attempting to determine how Lorrain has made the various stories overlap – or whether he has put them in a consistent order at all – is an exercise that destabilizes the reader and increases the absorption of the reader into the delusional reality of the author's protagonists. Once again, the presence of at least one mad hallucinator is key to the effect of this time-twisting phenomenon. A salient example of this difficulty is the conundrum of placing Alitoff's experiences on a logical timeline. Driving it all is the fact that Alitoff is erratic in his drug use and fear of real life and its inherent challenges. From the first story, the reader "knows" that Serge progresses from light ether-drinking, to raging addiction, to breaking his habit in Algeria and returning to Paris. In a later tale Alitoff claims to be "cured," but still suffering from the symptoms of ether addiction and experiencing hallucinations. An even later story ("Le possédé") definitely implies that though Alitoff claims to have been cured for just about two years (Lorrain 161), he had relapsed and had been using ether for roughly a year before the "present" (162) when he is leaving Paris (167). In other stories a protagonist (probably Alitoff) who is definitely suffering from delusions, but it is impossible to be certain. In the story "La mais menin gantée" reports that Serge had moved to the Midi, but without any other specific time reference (169). Attempting to reconcile the fragmentary components of Alitoff's timeline will lead the audience into bewildered instability; trying to fit in the non-Alitoff tales (including those mentioning de Jacquels) is even more difficult, and Lorrain thus intensifies the destabilization of the reader.

Des Esseintes and the protagonists in the *Contes* are essentially unlike such characters as Saint Antoine or Maldoror; Huysmans and Lorrain portray characters who do not just accept a reality different from the empirical world around them but actively choose it. In their protagonists, these authors create characters who exemplify the connections between *névrose*, excess, and *délire toxique*. Huysmans and Lorrain utilize these elements to fashion models of the incongruity between their protagonists' alternative reality and the real world around them embodied in the philosophical pair

$\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ . In these authors' formulation of these connections within the phenomenon of alternative reality, *névrose* is the primary mental pathology; for Huysmans and Lorrain, it is both a cause and result of the desire to exist in an altered reality outside of the empirical world. According to contemporary psychological models, excessive behavior and sensory or sentimental distortion is typical for *névrosés*, and seeking an alternative reality frequently involves indulgence of excess. These excesses and distortions are also common in the related phenomenon of *délire toxique*; both contemporary psychologists and the authors of *À rebours* and the *Contes* portray this condition as both a logical consequence and an aggravating factor of excesses committed in the search for an altered reality. Ultimately, neither des Esseintes' aesthetic efforts nor any of the other strategies used by the protagonists in the *Contes* for existing in an alternative reality works. The protagonists of Huysmans' and Lorrain's texts stay quite as *névrosé* as they were, or become more so, and they live in a state of hopeless uncertainty. Through their portrayals of *névrose*, *délire toxique*, and excess, these two

authors explore the aforementioned pair  $\frac{\text{alternative reality}}{\text{empirical reality}}$ , demonstrating the inevitable

incongruity between the hallucinatory and unstable alternative reality pursued by these characters and the observable state of *névrosé* addiction and confusion that results from their futile attempts to transform empirical reality.

Huysmans and Lorrain present a variety of insanity and associated distorted reality that is in many ways dissimilar to the delusion and higher truth of Flaubert and Maupassant as well as the *monomanie* and self-generated reality of Ducasse and Villiers; there are, however, underlying commonalities between all these works and their representations of the incongruity inherent in the philosophical pair  $\frac{\textit{apparence}}{\textit{réalité}}$ . All these authors portrayed the search for certainty and answers to the difficulties of empirical reality and linked this quest to contemporary models of insanity; the examination and synthesis of these representations give rise to important insights, not just for understanding of *fin de siècle* society and psychology, but also for an appreciation of how authors can draw their readers into these pathological conditions and instability in both an intellectual and visceral fashion.



## CONCLUSION: DELUSIONAL ANSWERS AND UNSTABLE CERTAINTY

Le bon sens nous dit que les choses de la terre n'existent que bien peu, et que la vraie réalité n'est que dans les rêves.

Charles Baudelaire, dedication to *Les paradis artificiels* <sup>57</sup>

Short story, episodic novel, quasi-epic; any of these can convey a warning against the pernicious but traditional response to rapid change: a quest for certainty and a thirst for absolute answers. Not only is the search for certainty not a solution, but according to the authors mentioned in this work, it can lead to mental disturbance and conflicts that are possibly even worse than the problems their protagonists were facing originally; turning to a reality separate from the empirical reality that contains the disturbing change aggravates such conditions and leads to instability and cognitive dissonance.

Baudelaire's concept of *paradis artificiel* englobes all the various realities that the characters in these works of fiction yearn for, no matter what the source the authors present of any particular delusional world. The pathology and disequilibrium that result from the quest for this *paradis artificiel* are all too often noxious and self-defeating; in deepening the disturbed incongruity represented by the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{apparance}}{\text{réalité}}$ , the individuals who pursue these artificial realities are not truly escaping the perils of the world around them, but are magnifying them.

In the language of "La Nouvelle rhétorique," the general form of the incompatibility between empirical reality and characters' substitute truths is the philosophical pair  $\frac{\text{apparance}}{\text{réalité}}$ . From the reader's point of view the specific version of this general pair that these six

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<sup>57</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. *Les paradis artificiels, opium et haschisch*. Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1860.

works share is the pair  $\frac{\textit{selective reality}}{\textit{empirical reality}}$ . Each of the three pairs of texts exemplify different variations of this pair; in all cases, however, the authors create protagonists who reject empirical reality for one that, in their minds at least, obviates the need for adaptation to the struggles of the real world. Flaubert, Maupassant, Ducasse, Villiers, Huysmans, and Lorrain all in addition formulate these selective realities with ties to various forms of mental pathology as seen in the contemporary psychological literature; such psychologists as Dechambre, Despine, Esquirol, and Firman describe conditions that correspond closely to the portraits of the protagonists drawn by the authors of the fiction examined here. The mental disturbances and devotion to selective reality that these authors incorporate into their protagonists suggest that the authors design these characters with a vision of the universe fundamentally opposite to that of adherents of empirical reality. In this way, the pair  $\frac{\textit{selective reality}}{\textit{empirical reality}}$  is functionally reversed to  $\frac{\textit{empirical reality}}{\textit{selective reality}}$ . In other words, the authors attribute to their protagonists a view that empirical reality is untrue while their selective realities represent essential truth. As a consequence, a reader who considers empirical reality the real world can perceive the ultimate futility and delusional nature of the characters' conception of what is versus what should be, while the protagonists themselves demonstrate their willfully blind commitment to self-serving illusion. These characters' selective reality is the same as the source of certainty in their chaotic lives; empirical reality is too difficult, too unpredictable, possibly even too antagonistic to them and so they turn to a version of reality that conforms to their desires, or at least that offers an escape from the fraught and disturbing nature of contemporary society and existence. These pathologies and selective realities do not represent the full

range of those in either the psychological literature of the time or in contemporary fiction; there are others that may be analyzed fruitfully; there are conditions such as *hystéro-épilepsie*, *manie*, and *sonmanbulisme* yet to be explored. Similarly there is great promise in looking at those authors who initially appear to be describing certain psychological conditions and selective realities while incorporating a certain bias toward other types of certainty such as Paul Bourget<sup>58</sup> and Maurice Barrès.<sup>59</sup>

The authors of the texts I have discussed that ensure that we, as the audience, become participants in such searches merely by the act of reading the narrative; their destabilization of structure and manipulation of narrative convention give rise to uncertainty and literary vertigo in readers, primarily on a visceral level. We know there is something unbalanced about the characters, but we also feel slightly delusional ourselves; in the language of philosophical pairs, the reader is consciously aware of the  $\frac{\text{selective "reality"}}{\text{empirical reality}}$  incongruity but has an unconscious sympathy with  $\frac{\text{empirical reality}}{\text{selective "reality"}}$ . We, as the audience, feel the addictive hunger of the characters. Empirical reality and selective reality are not opposites or mutually exclusive; the absence of one does not automatically translate into the presence of the other. The *paradis artificiel* is inevitably a distortion or variation of empirical reality, but one that fundamentally conflicts with it. It is this conflict that drives both the thematic and narrative qualities of disorientation and unease. There is a novel quality to such a combination of disturbing subject matter and narratological innovation; it behooves literary critics of our time to investigate the origins

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<sup>58</sup> *Le Disciple*, which purports to show criminal pathology as a function of *névrosé* reality while subtly promoting faith in an anti-rationalist, semi-religious dogma.

<sup>59</sup> *Les Déracinés*, another novel that portrays contemporary decadence and sensitivity as leading to criminality while championing a politically conservative doctrine.

of these combinations and their permutations. Similarly, there is a near-void in the application of argumentation theory in the tradition of “La Nouvelle Rhétorique” to literary-critical investigation; all too often, when specialists in literature hear the word “rhetoric” they instinctively assume that the term is meant in the sense of “stylistics,” forgetting the other side of the subject, the analysis of various discourses’ motivational and persuasive bases outside of rhetorical flourishes and the examination of how thought and language function as modes of action. This selective approach to rhetoric impoverishes literary criticism and deprives its practitioners of significant and insightful models of communication, its strategies, and its ultimate goals.

Conflict between empirical reality and selective reality is the result of a quest to have someone, or something, else resolve the conflict stemming from life in the modern era. This conflict remains critical even in our post-modern era; we live in another time of rapid and frequently bewildering change, and the human tendency to look for ready-made answers persists. We may no longer refer to the pathological conditions I have outlined as fixation on the otherworldly, *monomanie d’orgueil*, or *névrose*, but ideology, delusions of grandeur, and emotional hyper-sensitivity are all still very much a part of human responses to change; the distinction (or lack of distinction) between appearance and reality is still fundamental to humanity. Pathological reactions to societal and ideological perturbations are important questions in modern psychiatry and have persisted beyond the nineteenth century as a subject of literary exploration. We can see these questions, as well as the fundamental dichotomy between appearance and reality, in prominent fictional works throughout the modern period in the works of such authors as Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis, Albert Camus, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Bret Easton Ellis.

Then or now, there is no real “answer” to the unsettling effects of change; the most we can do is remind ourselves that willfully turning away from the difference between an easy answer and real-life problems is a path to certain madness.

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